

# 学戦都市

三屋咲ゆう  
illustration: okiura

# 反刻

03.  
鳳凰乱武

ほうおうらんぶ



三屋咲ゆう  
illustration: okiura



# 学戦都市 アスタリクス

03. ほうおうらんぶ  
鳳凰乱武



イレーネ・ウルサイズ  
IRENE URZAIZ  
Irene Urzaiz

Priscila Urzaiz  
プリシラ・ウルサイズ  
PRISCILA URZAIZ

「あなしがデイルから受けた命令は  
天霧綾斗、あんたを潰すことだ」

「すいません！うちの姉ちゃんがとんだご迷惑を……！」





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## Chapter 1 - The Opening Eve

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"Um..... You are the <Murakumo><sup>[1]</sup> Amagiri Ayato-senpai, right?"

During lunch break, as Ayato was taking his lunch at the table of the North Star Cafeteria, a lively female student with chestnut hair accosted him with a big smile.

".....Eh?"

"Umm....., May I have an autograph?"

Saying so, she readily extended a colored paper and a pen.

"Ah, yes..... I don't particularly mind."

Even though slightly pressed by the momentum, he wrote his name on the handed colored paper. Naturally, since he did not have a somewhat stylish signature, he wrote in his standard handwriting. Although confused at first, Ayato had somehow gotten used to it recently.

"Thank you..... very much! Good luck for the Phoenix! I will cheer for you!"

The girl, who received the signature, left while waving her hand greatly.

"Hahaha....."

Ayato, who saw her off with a wry smile, suddenly noticed cold gazes directed at him and hurriedly turned around.

"....."

Then, Julis and Saya, who sat opposite to him, were glaring at him with scornful eyes.

"Er.....what?"

"--Nothing. I just thought that the popular ones don't have it easy as usual."

"Ayato, you're too friendly. It worries me a lot."

"I-is that so.....?"

While feeling slightly uncomfortable at the pressure of the two girls, who seemed displeased, Ayato scratched his head as troubled.



It has already been one week since Ayato won the duel against Kirin and became the #1 rank of Seidokan Academy. These things were no longer unusual for him. In addition, it was a situation in which whatever such as fans letters, presents, coverage from the Media, various offers from companies, and the like, or anonymous harassment or intimidation, could occur.

Fortunately in the Academy, there seemed to be a department, which brought a follow of those sections, and though they were left in a lump, cases like fetching direct contact as a little while ago would naturally only be dealt by the concerned person himself.

"Princess and also Sasamiya, you shouldn't be so worked up on the details. Since a nameless non-ranked student has suddenly taken the first place, it's normal that it became like this."

Saying so while chuckling was Eishiro, who sat next to Ayato and was slurping the buckwheat noodles in hot broth.

Even looking at the past cases, in Seidokan Academy there were very few cases of a non-ranked student suddenly becoming #1 rank. This was because the nomination system in the official ranking matches made it impossible.

In the official ranking matches held monthly, the system was made so that, when a Page One received a duel request from a lower ranked student, he could not refuse the match; but the students, who participated in this, were divided in three major levels. The first one was that of the higher-ranked students called 'Top Twelve', the second was the level of the 'up-and-coming'<sup>[2]</sup> students, who had their name recorded in the Named Charts, and the third was the 'non-ranked' students, who did not have their name in the Named Charts.

In the official ranking matches, one could only appoint an opponent, who belonged to one level above. In other words, to appoint a Top Twelve as an opponent, it was necessary to at least belong to the level of up-and-coming students. Therefore, to suddenly become a Top Twelve from having been a non-ranked student, it was necessary to defeat one's opponent by the mean of duel — generally, as the ranking became higher, one would tend to be indeed wary of duel.

In fact, it could be said to be natural if one considered the size of what would be lost by their being defeated.



"That's right. I also, Um..... Luckily, I also became #1 rank by duel, but still it was when I was ranked #11. Even though it's me who says it, I think the case of Ayato-senpai, who suddenly became the rank #1 from being non-ranked, is much more sensational."

Even Kirin, who was next to Saya and was eating udon<sup>[3]</sup>, agreed with Eishiro.

Though until just a week ago, Kirin was ranked #1, she did not seem to be particularly depressed.

Furthermore, although in the ranking system of Seidokan Academy, due to a replacement system, Kirin was a non-ranked student at present, she was in a special situation called "moratorium"<sup>[4]</sup>. This was a right given to the up-and-coming students including the Top Twelve, and it was a measure in order to minimize the negative effects of the replacement system. Though the up-and-coming students could acquire various privileges, due to the fact that it would cause them trouble if they lose all at once by one defeat, they were guaranteed the same service for a certain period of time. In addition, the students at the moratorium in the most recent official ranking matches, if it was an opponent below one's old rank, had preferentially the right to challenge disregarding the level.

"To begin with, when even the Princess became a <Top Twelve>, hasn't it made pretty much of a racket?"

"It might have been so, but such a thing is going to turmoil of transient after all. It ended much earlier in my time, you know?"

To Eishiro's banter, Julis answered with a serious look.

"Well, it was because the Princess was completely shutout. With that degree of coldness, it would be normal to pull back."

"Unfortunately, I don't have the mind for that kind of services. I really appreciate the cheering, but I refuse to be used for crass selfishness. And if so, isn't it rather more sincere to decline all?"

As Julis said so, she operated a mobile terminal, and opened a space window.

"Net auction.....? Eh, ah!"



Ayato, who looked into it, raised his voice. This was because his signatures had been put up for sale. Moreover, he wondered whether he should be happy or sad that the price was considerably rising.

Even though it was something not that much time-consuming, witnessing this sort of end was indeed a bit of shock.

"Oh, it's one of the students' popular pocket-money earnings. It happened quite often."

Eishiro, who saw it from behind, tapped Ayato's shoulder.

"Don't mind it. You also have fans properly cheering for you, Ayato. Like me."

"T-that's right! In my class there is also a child, who is a fan of yours, Ayato-senpai, even me....."

To such follows of Saya and Kirin, Julis fearlessly smiled.

"Fufufu, saying such things, actually what do you intend to do if we confront each other in the Phoenix?"

"Oh, speaking of which, I recall the participation of both of you was confirmed, right?"

Although greatly surprised when he heard that Kirin accepted the invitation from Saya to register in the Phoenix preliminaries, it seemed that their participation was settled the other day since there was a vacant place due to some contestants not taking part.

".....Of course, at that time, we intend to fight you with all our might."

"Yes, I feel the same. And, this is a different issue."

Changing the topic completely, both of them turned a sharp, yet straight gaze at Ayato and Julis.

"Fufufu.....Well, it should be like that."

"If possible, I don't want to confront you guys, you know?"

Lately, Ayato and Julis were having practice tag team matches with the Saya – Kirin pair on a daily basis, but the winning percentage in actual combat format was about fifty-fifty.



Saya and Kirin were also working together so well that their coordination could hardly be regarded as a rapid increase tag; if they really were to confront them in the tournament, they would indubitably be formidable opponents.

"Fufufu..... I see that everybody is in high spirits. I can't wait."

Coming over there was Claudia with her usual mild smile.

"Oh, It's been a while Claudia. You seem to be very busy lately....."

"Yes, it's hard, since work increases with the approach of the Festa after all."

While saying so, Claudia unfolded a huge window space on the table.

".....However, since the tournament table of the Phoenix was announced just some time ago, I thought to let you know."

To these words, all looks focused on the space window in an instant.

There were so many names lined up in a row that even counting was troublesome, and a very high tournament table-like castle, which was standing towering above it.

"Wow..... There is an amazing number of participants."

The number of participants in the Phoenix was 512, that's, 256 sets (teams). Although it was common knowledge, when witnessing it like this, one would be overwhelmed by the sheer number.

"Well, let see, we are ..... Ah, here! We are in block L!"

"Hmm, we are..... in block C, huh. For the time being it doesn't look like we would clash until the final stage (main battle)."

Kirin and Julis mutually looked at each other, and lightly smiled as relieved.

The duration of the Phoenix was about two weeks. Within that period, in the first half, that's one week, commonly called preliminary, the best 32 would be elected. It was that combination table that Ayato and the others were looking at right now. Afterwards, those 32 sets (teams) were to be allocated to a new tournament table by drawing of lots; this was commonly known as the final stage (main battle). It was beyond this best 32 that the points entered to the affiliated Academy.



"But, Claudia, did you expressly come here just for this?"

As Claudia herself just said earlier, she was recently extremely busy. Certainly it was not as if the announcement date and time of the tournament table of the Festa was already determined, but even so Ayato and the others would have known it sooner or later; it was not something for which she would need to expressly come to convey.

"There is that; and it's also because you guys are top favorites after all. I must have you firmly prepared."

"F-favorites? How exaggerated....."

As Ayato lightly waved his hand to deny it, Eishiro with a stunned expression flicked his forehead with a finger.

"Fool, it's the tag of the rank #1, and the tag of the ex-rank #1 we are talking about, you know? There are no other favorites than you."

"That's right. Ayato, Toudou-san, excessive humility is also unpleasant; you must have a bit more confidence in yourselves. You are the representatives of our Academy after all."

"Y-yes....."

"Even if you said that....."

Lowering their eyebrows as troubled, Ayato and Kirin hanged their heads.

"Since especially this time, there are no strong participants, who will appear. Actually, it won't be strange even if either of you guys win the championship, you know?"

Eishiro's words were light, but he was not a man who would say useless compliments.

"As I see it, with members almost expected beforehand, I think that there won't be big surprise."

Though natural, No Academy would announce their contestants in the Festa beforehand, either.

But, it seemed that there would still be some info leaking from somewhere, which mostly seemed to turn out to be pretty much the same with the public expectations.



"Fortunately, the absolute figures such as in the previous Gryps and Lindvolus would not be there."

"Absolute?"

Ayato looked puzzled at Claudia's words.

"She's probably talking about the Silver Wing Knights of Garrardsworth in the Gryps and the Venomous Witch of Le Wolfe in the Lindvolus."

Julis said while shrugging her shoulders as if bored.

"In fact, each of them won a Festa with an overwhelming power more than that of the previous reputation. This time on the contrary it will be a large melee. Well, the Top Twelve of each Academy stand out as such....."

"The winning pair of the last Phoenix graduated. There is the rumor that the World Dragon pair, which was the runner-up, switched to the Gryps."

As expected, Claudia and Eishiro were well-informed.

As Ayato was listening in admiration, Claudia clapped her hands and looked around at everyone.

"Anyway, in the strategy of this season, this Phoenix is in a very important positioning. And it is not an exaggeration even if I say that the success or failure depends on you guys. I look forward to it."

Among the six Academies in Asterisk, there were Academies that were skillful in a specific Festa. St. Garrardsworth Academy with team battles in the Gryps, Le Wolfe Black Institute with individual battle in the Lindvolus, and Seidokan Academy with tag battles in the Phoenix, were respectively strong; even looking at the past data they had won those Festa the most.

In other words, for Seidokan, it could be said that earning points as much as possible here was a prerequisite for attaching to a higher rank in the overall ranking.

By the way, the coordination strength of the World Dragon Seventh Institute was high; instead of crying that they were strong in any Festa, it would be better to say that they left stable results in any Festa. The wave of Allekant Academy was violent, there was the characteristic that the Festa in which they were skilled, changed over a certain period of time<sup>[5]</sup>. Queen Veil Girl's Academy did not have a particular Festa, in which they were good.



"—Question."

Then Saya, who was silent until then and drinking orange juice, raised her hand.

"Yes, Sasamiya-san."

"What happened to the major contenders of the other Academies?"

To Saya who inquired like a student, Claudia, as expected, responded properly like a teacher.

"It's a good question.....is what I would like to say, but Sasamiya-san, you are only interested in those two persons of Allekant, right?"

Saya slightly frowned.

Saya had a minor squabble with a student of Allekant — Camilla, who came the other day in Seidokan, and she seemed to want to settle it.

"Those two are..... Ah, here it is. They are in block H."

Julis keenly checked the tournament table.

It meant that they would confront neither the Ayato team nor the Saya team until the final stage (main battle).

"Since there will be more info in the announcement from the Steering Committee about those people in various ways, there is nothing from me."

"—Really? Then is it a special case again?"

Eishiro's eyes brilliantly glittered, to the blurred words of Claudia.

"Ufufu....."

"Again?"

As she was bothered by the way of speaking of Eishiro and asked, Eishiro cheerfully explained.

"It is always what Festival regulation is being changed, make a special case, or broken. Well, hearing about trial and error is good, but it's very inconstant. Since normally thinking, it's impossible for the students of research classes to participate to the Festa—"



"The top priority of the Steering Committee is "to heat up the Festa". For that purpose, they incorporate more and more new things; if they judged that it will be detrimental, they will quickly throw it away.....That's all there is to it."

Interrupting Eishiro's words, Claudia rounded up the talk.

".....Hmm"

Although Saya seemed to be clearly dissatisfied, she seemed to find it difficult to get out any info from Claudia's behavior.

"T-then, about information of the other major contenders....."

"Yes, yes, Toudou-san. Please wait a little."

As Claudia sweetly smiled, she operated the portable terminal.

And, almost at the same time a mail went to the terminal of Ayato and the others.

"So, I sent the data of the neighborhood to everybody just now. Please consider it as a help of countermeasures."

"Oh, that helps a lot."

When they opened the data immediately, data of students, who amounted dozens of persons, seemed to have been recorded with a photographic portrait. From personal data such as height and weight, if there were combat experience, used weapons, Ogre Lux users and ability users, there were also that ability and other things attached to video recording data of duels and the like depending on the situation.

"No, no, it's something that any academy does. I'm sure that by now the data of everyone here are also probably being studied in other schools."

"Uh-huh, and it is said the intelligence capability of the school is seen in how reliable and comprehensive such data is."

Eishiro, who had not received one person's data, laughed as fun.

"Ah..... Speaking of which, I have heard from uncle that Le Wolfe and Queen Veil were good in that area."

"Well, it means that we will face them in light of their skill."

Though while saying so, Julis was looking at the data, her gaze suddenly stopped right away.

"—\* Sigh \*, she will appear after all, huh. How troublesome."

"What is troublesome?"

Ayato turned back to Julis, who sighed, and looked into her hand.

"This is the user of the Ogre Lux <Bloody Scythe of Supreme Destruction>. I don't know what the people of Allekant are plotting, but apart from it, among the guys that are rising here, the most dangerous would probably be this fellow."

"The name — Irene Urzaiz, huh."

There, a female student with strangely sharp eyes was revealing a fearless smile.

---

If one were to describe the Central Big School Building of Le Wolfe Black Institute, the word "Fortress" would be appropriate. Uncouth yet serious, it was the iron crag, which clotted power and intimidation.

However, though it tended to be misunderstood, there was not that much chaotic sense of decadence there. Whether being an Academy regarded as the polar opposite of Garrardsworth, which was the Academy of discipline and order, or from the image of redevelopment areas that bad students and they considered as their stronghold, there were many people who held the impression such as the place where Le Wolfe in itself badly went to ruin – The reality was somewhat different.

Certainly there were no school regulations of equality in Le Wolfe, and although it was known as the den of individualists from the outside, this was because the only absolute rule had rooted widely deep here.

—In other words, "the absolute obedience to the Strong".

For Le Wolfe, power was all, and victory was above all revered, but at the same time it played the role of a kind of brake. An overly defiant behavior might be frowned upon by a stronger power.



Another reason was, as a prejudice currently borne by outsiders, it was also said that 'all the students of Le Wolfe were people similar to atrocious and fearful beasts.'

This also must be referred to as being a great misunderstanding. Such people were about 80% to 90% at best. As for at least around 10%, even in Le Wolfe, there were students, who managed a legitimate student life.

—Kashimaru Corona, who belonged to those 10%, had always wanted to say so loudly. But she had never once done it; all she was doing was just thinking about it.

"What are you doing, Corona? Hurry up and come."

"Ah, y-yeah! I'm sorry.....!"

Reprimanded by the plump male student, who went ahead, she hurriedly caught up with his back on the run.

Dirk Eberwein. As the dominant force in Le Wolfe Black Institute, it was a young man who arrived at the seat of student council president as a non-Starpulse Generation for the first time.

Though there were many cases where the students of Le Wolfe were inevitably regarded as villains in the Festa, this Dirk was the most loathed and hated in such Le Wolfe

Never getting his hands dirty, and while moving people like pieces on a board, the man who was sneakily scheming — Dirk's reputation was probably something like that. Frankly speaking, it was the worst. Even though he was not in the ranking, and was willfully given the nickname "Unscrupulous King" by the students, it was understandable.

In fact, Corona herself did not think that Dirk was that much of a bad human being.

Of course, his way of speaking and his attitude were detestable, and let alone his face, which ill-humoredly laughed all the time, she had never seen him broadly smile; but anyway, for Corona, Dirk was an irreplaceable benefactor. If he were the kind of human that everyone said he was, would he have entered Le Wolfe by mistake, and (or) expressly appointed just a goofy girl like her with no merit as secretary?

If it were not for Dirk, a helpless student like Corona might have already fallen in the lowest level campus caste to only be exploited.

(Given what he has done (so far), I can't really say that he's a good person, but I don't think that he's such a bad person, either, as publicly said.....)

Whether or not aware of what Corona was thinking, Dirk silently advanced through the gloomy corridor, which somewhat wore a damp feeling. The security level was high around here; it was a section, where the entry was not allowed to average students.

(Eh? If I'm not mistaken, what's ahead is—)

Corona's face quickly turned pale.

"Um, President.....? Perhaps where we are going now is....."

"Ah? It's obviously the discipline room."

"I-I was right!?"

Speaking of the discipline room, it was so to speak a place like a prison, in which students, who committed an act that reached the degree of flagrant, were put for sanctions. As a result, since only the heinous violent student even within Le Wolfe were gathered there, to a petite bourgeois such as Corona, it was an out-of-the-way place, which she wanted if possible to always remain an out-of-the-way as it is.

However, Dirk passed the security checks one after another, and headed towards a secluded place even within the discipline room. Though things that looked like rooms delimited by thick walls were lined up on both sides of a narrow passage, just by putting up the number plate where were written down a series of digits (number), things that looked like doors were nowhere to be found. Though at the entrance, the security guard offered to accompany him, Dirk seemingly annoyed by it, flatly turned it down, for Corona, there was nothing as discouraging as this.

Angry voices and boos, which leaked from the rooms lining the passage, and sounds like one was rampaging around or beating walls were flying about.

"Uuuuuuuuhh....."

Corona was timidly advancing while bending her body behind Dirk, who is shorter than herself. While Corona, a Starpulse Generation, who was frightened, Dirk, who was an ordinary person, was instead walking without paying heed to it.



Dirk stopped in front of one room before long.

As he held up his hand to the number plate, an optical display appeared; when he operated it, the wall facing the passage disappeared as if being transparent. When looking at the place where the number plate itself which was floating in the air without disappearing, it was not as if the wall itself disappeared, it was only the transparency mechanism which was operated.

"Yo, bitch. Are you alive?"

When Dirk called out so to towards the room, within the room about the size of a three-tatami, there was a sign of something moving. Though there was no light within the room and it was just faintly visible, it seemed that someone was sitting, leaning against the back wall.

"—Ah, it's just you, huh. What business do you have as to expressly come all the way till here?"

Though said in a rude tone like Dirk, the voice was high. It was a female student.

When Corona looked closely, she was finally able to discern her appearance.

With an arm tied with handcuffs extending from the wall, she was daringly sitting cross-legged with her uniform figure. Even though it was summertime, a long muffler was rolled around her neck, whether thinking that, she was not wearing an undershirt under her worn-out uniform; it was a very mismatch appearance.

Corona, who was steadily staring at that unique appearance, was keenly glared at (by her) with eyes akin to those of a hung-up wolf, and unintentionally backed off before that intensity.

"Well, I have a request to ask you."

"Hahaha."

That girl scornfully laughed at Dirk's words.

"A request? You wanted to say 'an order', right? Since you say it seriously, I don't have the right of veto."

"If you listen to me, I will get you out from there even right now."

"Before that, didn't you prepare even one supply of provisions? I'm starving to death. If you want, even that young girl will do."

"Hiiiiih!"

Corona walked around so as to hide behind Dirk's back.

"Will you do it, won't you do it? Which is it?"





Dirk continued his point without paying attention to the girl's joke.

"Yeah, yeah..... So, what do you want me to do?"

"It's not a big deal. It's just to crush a boy of Seidokan. So that he would be beyond recovery. I don't mind even if it's in a duel, but the Phoenix is just the right situation. Go for it. —Corona, is the participation Registration done?"

"Eh? Ah, yeah!"

Though surprised to be suddenly talked to, Corona buzzingly nodded.

Speaking of which, as Dirk said, she had performed the substitute application of Phoenix participation registration, but was it for this? However, she did not think that he had not yet talked through it to the person in question.

"Enter the Phoenix?"

"There's a possibility to be rejected for a duel, but it can't be so in the Festa."

As Dirk said up to there, he suddenly looked into the room.

"If it's you, it'll be a piece of cake to advance to the final stage, right? It'll also be the same for him. Since that way, you'll confront each other somewhere, crush him. You don't need to win."

The last words were with a voice seeming to resound from the bottom of a deep hole.

A cold chill ran to Corona's spine.

".....Oh, of course if you can do it, I don't mind even if you win the championship."

"Don't say it as if it was easy, dude!"

Even while saying so, the girl happily shook her shoulders.

The chains jingled and jangled.

"—There are several things I want to ask."

"Speak."



"First of all, if your target is just one boy, you should just use the <cats>, right? Why do you specially give such a job to me?"

"Because you're the most suitable for the stage called Phoenix. Besides, both <cats> <sup>[6]</sup> need their hands free. On top of that, if I move those guys, they will take the bait."

"Is it the only reason?"

".....The boy is ranked #1 in Seidokan. If I'm to use the <cats>, it'll be bad for us. Firstly, I want to use legitimate means as much as possible."

The girl, who heard it, cacklingly laughed.

"Ranked #1? Hey, are you serious? Do you want me to confront such a guy?"

"I would not give you this job, if it was impossible."

The girl silently looked down for a while as she was lost in thought, but she raised her face before long and spoke.

"Secondly. The reason aiming at the boy?"

Whether or not Dirk was also surprised by the question, the clicking tongue sounded through the passage.

It was a habit of Dirk when he was irritated.

"I don't have the obligation to tell you that, but.....Well, it's fine. Do you know the <Demon Sword of the Black Furnace( Ser-Vesta )>?"

"Haa? What's that?"

"It's an Ogre Lux of Seidokan for scholarship. That boy is its user. He doesn't seem to have already mastered it, but if we let things go by, since it will become a troublesome fellow in the future; we must crush him now, before it's too late."

"Hmmm..... Ogre Lux, eh? It must be very powerful, since you say up to there."

"—Anyone would think so after witnessing its strength."

Dirk muttered as if spitting out.

Those words were not addressed to the girl. Dirk talked like that just to persuade himself.

"Well good, then the last question..... It's more of a confirmation."

When the girl said so, she looked straight at Dirk's eyes.

"—I hope that no one will get in my way."

"Of course. You probably know, right? I always honored contracts."

Corona took the eyes that seemed to shrink at only by the aftermath calmly, and Dirk nodded.

Though the two people silently glared at each other for a while, until he eventually diverted his line of sight from the girl.

".....Well, just because I wreaked havoc in a mere casino, how long do you plan to keep me locked here? If it's a job, I'll gladly accept it, Dirk Eberwein."

"You should have said so quickly, Irene Urzaiz."

As Dirk complained with a seemingly bored face, he operated an optical keyboard.

The chain came off with a jangled sound, and the girl — Irene stood up and greatly stretched herself.

"\*sigh\*..... Good grief"

While letting her shoulders loose with a cracking sound, Irene muttered.

Her back was quite high and her flexible, well-proportioned body looked like that of a carnivorous animal.

"Well then, for the time being..... I'll have a meal."

Two big sharp fangs stuck out from the mouth of Irene, who said so while grinning.

## Chapter 2 - The Phoenix Star Warriors Festival(Phoenix)

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Asterisk Central District General Main Stage was known as "Sirius Dome".

Although including this main stage, the Festa would be held considering the large eleven stages as the setting, the opening ceremony of the 25th Festa was currently held in that Sirius Dome.

Though Ayato once had Julis guide him and had come up to here, this was the first time that he set foot in it.

The stage of Sirius Dome was still wide enough even with all the contestants of the Phoenix gathered there. In fact, although it was likely to be divided into smaller areas during the matches, the whole surface was used in this opening ceremony. Although the contestants of each academy were standing in line, there were students apparently absent in some academies. That was particularly remarkable in Le Wolfe side, which, compared to Garrardsworth that was impeccably and neatly lined, was like the difference between the heaven and Earth.

"Still, there is an amazing number of people."

"Fufufu, are you referring to the contestants'? Or—"

As she heard the mutter that carelessly leaked out from Ayato's mouth, Julis, who was standing nearby, turned her gaze around as she said so with an impish smile.

"Are you saying it looking at this audience?"

Exactly as the words stated, the audience surrounding the stage was very overcrowded.

"Hahaha.....well, I wonder which it is."

Though he heard that the place could accommodate about one hundred thousand people, he was just overwhelmed when actually seeing it like this. The stands, which were divided into several layers, were high enough to look up, and from the top floor layer, the place, where they were, would probably look like only a doll.

When telling in such a low voice, Julis exaggeratedly shrugged her shoulders.



"During matches, a huge space screen in the upper area will be unfolded. It seems that those, who don't see from there, will watch the matches over the screen."

"Then, there's no meaning to expressly come all the way here to watch....."

"I also don't quite understand, but it seems that it's important for them to watch the matches while being here."

While thinking "is it like that?" he returned his gaze.

A platform was prepared in front of the contestants, who were radially lined up; though until a while ago, the mayor of Asterisk finished with the greetings there, a middle aged man showed up after him on that podium.

"—Ladies and gentlemen, good morning. I am overjoyed to be able to see your heroic figures this year again like this. And I must say to those, who came over from this year to Asterisk, that I am glad to meet them. I am the chairman of the Steering Committee, Madeus Mesa."

As the man greeted so with a very calm voice, he revealed a friendly smile.

"That person is the chairman? He is quite young."

He was probably at least in his mid-thirties. If he was a committee member of the Festa, it meant that he was the chief executive, who was substantially managing the Festa. Though he should naturally be an executive of the Integrated Enterprise Foundation, there was no doubt that he was younger than Kirin's uncle, Kouichirou.

Intrepid look and cheerful voice, nevertheless one could feel that he was somewhat laid-back. Owner of a well-trained body, which one could understand even when seeing from afar, he was obviously a Starpulse Generation.

".....Madeus Mesa is an OB (alumnus) <sup>[7]</sup> of Seidokan, you know?"

With a face, which said that she knew at least that much, Julis sighed.

"I forget his age, but it's clear that he is young. He has not yet reached 40. In his student days, he was a strong man who reined in the Phoenix."

"I see. No wonder....."

The power of his calm, yet massive prana, even though restrained, could be fully felt.

"Even if he's the committee chairman, he's a fairly skilled man. He was appointed a few years ago, but as the reformists' top, he has performed one after another the enactment of the new system, events and regulation changes. Moreover, all of them are highly rated."

"Since he's an OB from our academy, it means that he's an Executive of Galaxy, right?"

"Only in name."

"Only in name?"

As Ayato looked puzzled to that point, Julis answered as bored.

"The time when Madeus Mesa won the Phoenix, he apparently wanted to enter the Steering committee after graduation."

"Oh, so such a thing is possible."

Though the basis condition of the Festa was that the Integrated Enterprise Foundation would grant any wish to the winner, it was probably not a really pleasant situation for the management side that the person concerned was to dig into that system part.

"It's not a world, in which you can somehow manage just by entering it, but I have also heard that he laid groundwork in various ways from his student days. Though I have also met him several times, he's a very shrewd man."

"Hmm....."

Ayato fixedly stared at Madeus.

At that moment, Ayato felt like — Madeus' gaze caught exactly his.

(Eh.....?)

However, since it was just for an instant, even he was not sure.

"—Having said that, even if we talked too much for a long time here, since it would probably only dampen your interest, I think I'll end it by conveying to you another important regulation change. Well, it has been already notified to the academies' side, even though there apparently was some leak from that situation that has been spread."

So, since Madeus continued to speak as if nothing happened, Ayato began to think that it might have been his imagination.

"Although such a restriction was not originally installed on Lux, as the evolution of technology was remarkable, inconvenient parts came out in various ways. To be more specific, it was about how to treat a machine performing autonomous maneuver as a weapon."

As expected, it was Saya, who reacted first to this.

Even though until a while ago she was dozing off while standing, she was now glaring at the front with a serious expression.

"Although it is a basic principle of our management to provide you a free place as long as it can be possible, for example when this is left, it will become possible for individuals to bring in multiple autonomous mobile weapons as weapons. This is not indeed all right. ....Oh, of course it is a different issue if talking about the abilities of Strega and Dante though."

As Madeus was familiar with the topic, he carefully continued his explanation while slipping in moderate words.

"On the other hand, it is out of the question to impose a restriction on the number of weapons. Though it would be faster to prohibit the use of autonomous mobile weapons, like I said earlier, a simple restriction is not what we desire. It would lead to stagnation, and eventually invite to the decline. Therefore — I want you to understand that this is, to the bitter end, a measure to reference for future discussions, but.....only this time, it was decided that they could participate as 'substitute contestants'."

The entire hall was immediately astir.

Not only the students, but also the stands simultaneously became enlivened.

"To you who are wise, I want you to understand that this is not to advantage a specific academy, but rather to ensure the equality in the near future. I want you to believe that we always do everything we can in order to prepare the best way for you."

As he waited until the hustle and bustle settled and further continued so, this time, Madeus greatly spread his hands towards the stands.

"And — to you, who love the Festa and give us support, please expect that this is connected to a new Festa that evolved by one step again. Because



the Festa is always the best amusement in the world, the stage providing a matchless excitement and deep emotions, and the supreme entertainment which quavered one's soul!"

Along with the loud declaration, a stormy applause simultaneously arose from the audience stands. Though Claudia had said that he had a tendency to welcome new trials with the mood of "it is all right anyway as long as the audience is excited" for the time being, it seemed to be quite so.

On the other hand, in contrast, the contestants' reaction was rather cold. Since it was certain that the trouble would increase no matter how one thought, it was probably also unavoidable.

When Madeus finished the greetings, he got down the platform while smilingly waving his hand.

Then, the boring ceremony continued for a while, and the contestants were finally released when noon drew near.

『Well then, this concludes the opening ceremony of the 25th Festa as well as the 24th Phoenix. Players from block A to block I, who are to participate today in the Phoenix, are prayed to move to the corresponding stage by the time specified.』

"Um, since for us this main stage is the meeting place, we don't really have to move, right?"

While hearing the announcement of the meeting place, everyone successively left from the stage.

Although the first round would be held over four days, the first match of Ayato and Julis was today, which was the opening day.

"Yeah. That said, there is a lot of time until the match, so we may take a light meal."

"Mmm, then let's do so."

Since Ayato was also hungry, he had no objection.

"If it's the case, together with Saya and Kirin-chan.....eh?"

Ayato started to say so, and looked around restlessly.

Saya and Kirin, who should have been there until a while ago, were nowhere to be found.

Since their first match should be tomorrow, there would be no need for them to move.

"Where did both of them go.....?"

Since neither Saya nor Kirin was tall, it was rather difficult to search for them in this crowd.

"Oh!"

Among the students heading towards the front gate of the dome, he found familiar faces.

It was not that of Saya and Kirin, but even so it was just nice.

"Hi, Lester. You guys have a match today, right?"

In contrast to Ayato, who called out to him with a smile, Lester McPhail stopped with a really wry face.

".....So what?"

"We also have a match today, and we were just now talking about going to take a meal. If it's fine with you, how about going together — Oh, of course Randy, too?"

Next to Lester, a pudgy student was standing in blank amazement. It was Lester's tag partner, Randy Hook.

"Hey Amagiri.....I've already said it many times, but I don't intend to get along with you!"

Thrusting his finger to the front, Lester said as irritated.

"No, I don't mean that, but.....you know, I haven't thanked you yet for lending me a Lux last time."

"As if I need it! Anyway we've to move from here on; if you want a meal, go eat there! Let's go, Randy!"

"Ah, w-wait for me, Lester!"

Randy chased after Lester, who was quickly moving away with long strides. Ayato remembered that he had somehow seen a similar scene before.

But, this time unlike that memory, Lester's feet stopped on the way and he looked back.

"I'll just say one thing. The opponent that I want to fight the most in this Phoenix, are not those guys of other academies, but you guys. Don't lose until we fight!"

And this time for sure Lester squared his shoulders and moved away.

"He's a difficult man as usual....."

Though Julis, amazed, said so, Ayato wondered if it was his imagination that there was some sort of sympathy in her words.

".....There you are Ayato."

"Uwaah!"

Suddenly hugged on the spot from behind, Ayato unintentionally raised his voice.

"—Saya, huh.....don't surprise me like that."

".....You are full of openings."

Saya, who held on to the area of the waist, just said so slightly proudly.

Though it was not as if Ayato let his guard down, having said that, it also did not mean he had to brace himself around the clock.

"So, where were you? I was looking for you, you know?"

"I-I'm sorry. I went a little to the locker room to get this....."

As he turned around, Kirin, who had a big load, was standing apologetically behind Saya.

"What's that?"

"Fuffuffu, you'll be surprised when hearing it. —It's a bento<sup>[8]</sup>."

Saya, who parted from Ayato, slightly puffed up her chest and said.



".....Did you say bento?"

Julis, with a dubious expression, stared at Saya.

"U-um, actually, last time I have consulted with Sasamiya-senpai — not that, Saya-san.....err, about what I can do to cheer you on, but.....If it is all alright with you, please eat it!"

As Kirin said so, she held out the stacked boxes<sup>[9]</sup> which, she had in her hands, with a face dyed red.

"Oh, did you make it expressly?"

As Kirin repeatedly nodded while looking down, Saya brimming, with confidence, was contrastive.

"I can't really say.....anything, since I haven't that much experience in cooking, Saya-san taught me.....Oh, but, it's really something very simple, though.....!"

"Eh, is Sasamiya so good in cooking that she can teach it to someone else?"

"Ehem!"

When opening the stacked boxes in sideways of Saya, who got more and more cocky, there were many rice balls packed there. The shapes were awfully crooked, and even though one could not say that the appearance was by any standard good, it showed that there was that much hard work, which was put into it.

"I-I am sorry.....I am really clumsy....."

"No, I'm glad. Thank you, Kirin-chan."

Ayato said so and gently patted Kirin's head.

"Uwuh....."

Kirin leaked a thin voice and further curled herself up.

"Unh!"

Saya, who saw it, strongly pulled Ayato's sleeve.

"Ayato, Ayato. Look at mine, too."

"Ah, yes."

When opening the second tier compartment set of the stacked boxes as he was said, there were once again rice balls packed there. Their shapes were arranged much better than those of Kirin and they looked really delicious.

Just one point—

"There are.....err, very big."

Julis, who looked into the stacked boxes, muttered with an expression that said 'no comment' (I have nothing to say).

In fact, these rice balls were nearly three times bigger than the normal ones. The way they were earnestly fit into the stack boxes without gaps was quite the masterpiece.

"Better too big than too small. It's my motto."

"I don't mind, but..... don't tell me that all these stacked boxes contain only rice balls?"

"Is there a problem with it?"

".....No, I was just a little impressed by you, who insist in calling that 'teaching cooking' with this."

"Ehem."

"I'll say this just in case, but it's not a compliment."

Julis said so while holding her temple, but Saya did not seem to care about it.

"Now, now, isn't it just nice that it's likely to be enough even if we eat this all together?"

"It was originally my intention."

"So she says, Julis?"

Taking a stab at arousing her interest, Julis nodded while revealing a somewhat puzzled expression.

".....Well, if it's like that, shall I keep your shares?"

"Alright, it's decided. Then, let's find some relaxing place....."

Saya once again strongly pulled the sleeve of Ayato, who started to say so.

"Hmmm?"

"—Me, too."

Saya unusually had a slightly embarrassed expression.

Even though saying it, since only a slight redness on her cheeks was visible, it would probably not be understood by someone, whose acquaintance was short.

"Me, too.....?"

Though Ayato thought for an instant "What are you talking about?", he understood when he saw Saya sending quick sideways glances towards Kirin.

"Ah, perhaps.....Saya, too?"

"It's not good to be unfair."

While smiling wryly, Ayato also patted Saya's head just like he did with Kirin. Since she was shorter than Kirin, it was somewhat easy to stroke her head.

".....Yeah, it's a pleasant feeling."





While squinting down comfortably, Saya was in great delight.

Her figure somehow seemed to hark back to a cat and was strangely heartwarming.

"\*kehen\*"

There, Julis coughed with a disappointed expression.

"Well then — that's right, our waiting room should already be usable. If it's there, we can eat calmly."

Saying so, she proceeded rapidly alone.

"Wow, wait a minute, Julis!"

Having said that, certainly it was not like they could indefinitely stay like this in the aisle.

As Ayato urged Saya and Kirin, he noisily ran after Julis, who went ahead, with the stacked boxes.

---

"Phew.....Thank you for the delicious meal."

After finishing eating the last rice ball, Ayato joined both his hands together.

"You are welcome. Oh, I will make the tea now."

Then, Kirin, who had already finished eating, poured the tea from the mug bottle, which she apparently brought. The preparation was indeed nice (good).

"Thank you, Kirin-chan."

"U-um, so.....?"

"Yes, it was delicious."

Kirin's face shone at these words.

In fact, although the shape of Kirin's rice balls was awkward, there was no problem with their taste.

As she was very anxious, now she wore a facial expression revealing half joy and half relief.

".....I ate a little too much."

On the other hand, Saya, lying down on the sofa, was rubbing her stomach.

"Of course it would be so, if one person were to eat three or four of those huge rice balls."

Julis, who was sitting nearby, said so with an amazed look.

"—Oops, I think it's almost time."

Ayato, who checked the time, turned on the TV provided to the room. Though the waiting room was quite large, and too much for only four people, the space screen was unfolded near the wall surface.

『.....Hi, hi, we are here in the first match site of the 24th Phoenix at the Sirius Dome. The live broadcasting will be transmitted by the ABC announcer I, Yanase Miko, and the commentator, who is an OJ<sup>[10]</sup> of World Dragon Seventh Institute, and the commanding officer of the present Executive Aladfar, Pham Thi Châm-san.』

『Thank you, please treat me well.』

『Alright, it may be too late, but let's review the basic rules! As for the conclusion of a match, when the school badges of both persons of a pair is destroyed, or in the case that the defeat judgment is made by loss of consciousness or give up, victory or defeat is declared through the school badge.』

『It's different from the Gryphs, in the point which said that you lose if your leader is defeated.』

Two women, one with fluffy curly hair and the other with trimmed short black hair, were reflected in the space screen. The former was the live broadcasting announcer.

"It's almost time for the beginning of the first match, huh. Since we are in the second match, we can still relax a bit."

"Come to think of it, in addition to this, the other matches also take place in various halls at the same time, right? How do they do with the broadcast?"

To Ayato's question, Julis replied as bored.

"There is a broadcast frame for each stage. It's common to choose the place one likes, but.....it seems that avid fans watch all of them at the same time in multiple channels."

Speaking only of the first round, there were 33 matches, which would be held on the first day in all eleven stages. Though the matches start time seemed to be put off little by little, even so it was hard to check all of them at the same time.

".....Even though the summary of all the matches will be broadcasted later anyway."

"It seems to be a real thrill for those people to watch them in live."

To Saya, lying down as it is with only her gaze turned to the TV, Kirin responded with a wry smile.

"Oh, but being allotted to this main stage is also the proof of being a major contender, right?"

"Hmmm, it is so."

"As usually, it is certain that players, who attract attention, are allotted. If it's a pair in which a #1 rank is, it would be only natural—"

As Julis said so, she pointed to the screen with her chin.

The names of the tags, which would do the matches in this Sirius Dome, were exactly displayed there.

Among those names, which were made entry for the third match, there were some familiar names.

".....Oh, so those girls also have a match here today, huh."

—Ernesta Kühne and Camilla Pareto. It was the pair of the Allekant matter.

"....."

Saya, remaining silent, raised her body, and glared at the screen with sharp eyes. In those eyes, a strong determination was perceived. She was probably thinking about quite a lot of things.

While looking sideways at such a Saya, Julis stood up and greatly stretched her body.

"Well, it's better to concentrate on the match before us than thinking about an opponent that we are not even sure to confront."

Since what she said was indeed true, Ayato also greatly nodded.

"If I am not mistaken, the first opponents of Ayato-senpai and Julis-senpai are the knight candidates of Garrardsworth, right?"

"Yeah, they are the #30 rank and #41 rank."

The Top Twelve were commonly known as the "Silver Knights", and those with ranks lower than it were placed as candidates. In Garrardsworth, which was the only called "prestigious school" out of the six academies, they were probably without doubt outstanding students among the up-and-coming students. In fact, their data and combat experience corroborated (endorsed) it.

—However.

"What do you think, Ayato? Can you do it?"

"Well.....I should just try doing what I have to do."

Julis and Ayato looked at each other and laughed lightly.

Kirin, who saw it, was wonderingly puzzled.

"Have you some sort of special strategy?"

"No."

However, Julis quickly shook her head.

"It's rather the opposite. —Well, you should just watch."

---

『—Now then, today's second match, the block C pair first round match will begin! 』

The live broadcast announcement resounded in the huge stage.



While a moment later, big cheers as to shake heaven and earth broke out, and multiple lights danced right and left, Julis and Ayato slowly advanced from the entrance gate to the stage.

『Now, the first to appear are the Seidokan Academy #1 rank, contestant Amagiri Ayato, and the rank #5, contestant Julis Alexia Van Riessfeld! The contestant Amagiri, to the general surprise, just became #1 rank several weeks before this Phoenix! And moreover, since he won in a direct duel against the former #1 rank and became #1, it's just a supernova that we have almost no data about him! Oh, by the way, it seems that he was given the nickname <murakumo> by the student council president Miss Enfield.』

『He is the only #1 rank contestant participating in this Phoenix. As far as I watch video that currently appeared on the market, it certainly seems that he is considerably strong. We expect a lot from him.』

『Oh, yeah, since it was in the documents, I also saw it, but it said that how much duel it was, it was not quite satisfactory. If only he has at least appeared in the official ranking matches. Oh, yeah! It seems that that contestant Amagiri is the user of <The Demon Sword of The Black Furnace(Ser-Versta)>, one of the Ogre Lux for scholarship in Seidokan Academy, but.....do you know it, Châm-san?』

『Ah, it's one of the so-called "Demon Sword of Four Colors". It's famous among the famous, but even I had only seen it in old image data. The last decade, it was said that it's an Ogre Lux so hard to please that no user came out. Though <The Demon Sword of the White Filter(Lei-Glems)> of Garrardsworth is the most famous among The Demon Sword of Four Colors, I want to see a similar non-defensive weapon<sup>[11]</sup>.』

『I see, I see. In addition to this, his tag partner is the contestant Riessfeld, who is the Petalblaze Witch. It would not be an exaggeration to say that they are one of the favorites!』

『The contestant Riessfeld is a young woman with a remarkable (conspicuous) variegation of ability. As a Strega, she is among the top class even in the current generation. And it seems that she still has room for growth; by all means I want her to come to our company after graduation.』

『No, since the contestant Riessfeld is a real princess, wouldn't finding employment at PMC be indeed difficult. 』

『Yeah, unfortunately. Anyway, for the time being the attention is shifted to the contestant Amagiri.』

『Well then, we will continue with Garrardsworth's tag.....』

Though the live broadcasting and the commentary still continued, there Julis poked the side of Ayato with her elbow.

"It's said that you're the center of attention, contestant Amagiri."

Saying so in a low voice, she chuckled.

"Even though I'm already nervous, why do you say such a thing?"

As Ayato returned with a wry smile, Julis, without breaking her smile, looked into Ayato's face.

"Don't lie. You don't seem very nervous. It's your usual carefree face."

"Even if I'm like this, I'm telling that I'm nervous. Since I don't like to attract the public attention that much."

"It's too late to say that now when you are standing on the most outstanding stage in the world."

Julis shook her shoulders with a chuckle.

"I see that you are not nervous at all, Julis. Even though like me, it's your first participation in the Festa"

"I may look like this, but I'm a princess. I'm used to attracting attention. —Get ready soon."

Julis recovered a serious look and stared in front of her (ahead).

When looking, from the entrance gate on the other side, a pair of young men had already activated their Lux. Though with a tall youth and a youth with a somewhat small stature, they looked like an uneven (incongruous) pair, each of them was holding a sword-type Lux. In Garrardsworth, conventionally sword techniques were considered the path of righteousness, and it also seemed that there were a lot of students there, who chose a sword as their weapon.

Ayato also took out Ser-Versta from the holder on his waist, but he did not activate it yet.

『Oh, the match start time is gradually drawing near! I wonder regarding this match, who will be the one seizing victory, Seidokan or Garrardsworth? Well then, today's second match finally starts!』

As if responding to the voice of the live, the school badges worn on the chest emitted a light. Since the Festa time processing was fully automated, neither declaration nor agreement was required like in a usual duel.

"Phoenix Block C first round set, match start!"

At the same time the mechanical sound of the school badge told the game start, the two of Garrardsworth set up their sword and charged straightforward. According to the data, both of them, who were skilled in close range combat, was an offensive pair, which did not establish a rear guard. Perhaps by bringing to close combat, they probably intended to finish the game in an instant. If Ayato was to intercept one of them, the other one would go toward Julis to seal her act as a rear guard (of Ayato). It was a simple, yet effective strategy.

".....Well, it is within the expectation."

However, Julis, with her arms folded, nodded with full of room to spare.

She did not even take out her Lux.

"Well then Ayato, I leave it to you."

"Roger."

While answering, Ayato concentrated his prana in one go.

"—Secret sword bound by the prison of stars, release your might!"

The prana, which increased, broke the seal applied on Ayato, and an explosive prana was released. Ser-Versta, which activated at the same time, let its huge blade shine.

"Wha—!?"

Surprised at the quantity of prana, the two of Garrardsworth slightly eased up their speed.

In an instant, quick as the wind.

"Eh.....?"

"Ah.....!"

For the two, it might not have only felt like Ayato suddenly disappeared.

But, after a little while, their two school badges broke with a dry sound and fell.

—Running through between the two people, Ayato released a slashing with a god-like speed.

"End of the match! Winner, Amagiri Ayato & Julis Alexia Van Riessfeld!"

In the hall, which fell silent as if having been hit by water, a mechanical sound echoed.

Just like the silence of a blank space (vacuum).

—However, taking time into consideration even if a little, big cheers soon wrapped up the hall as if bursting out.

『.....This, this is amazing! There was not even time to do a live commentary! What speed! What strength! This is no longer of the level of being called overwhelming!』

『Oh dear! Nicely done!』

『What surprised me even more than that strength, and more than anything was contestant Amagiri's very flashy performance! A ridiculous amount of prana instantly rises up just like a pillar, and the hall was also in great excitement regarding this!』

『If it's only the amount of prana, I think he doesn't lose to our president<sup>[12]</sup>, either. I wonder if he could come to our company after graduating. He would become an immediate asset<sup>[13]</sup>.』

While excitement and enthusiasm swirled, Garrardsworth's tag was standing just like that in blank amazement.

As he returned to Julis' side while slightly feeling sorry for them, she went out to meet Ayato, who lightly raised his hand.

"Fufufu, as expected."

He did a high five<sup>[14]</sup> to Julis, who revealed a satisfied smile, the two left the stage as it is. The match time did not probably even reach ten seconds. It was indeed an instant killing.



"After this, it's the winner interview. Whatever you are asked, evade it properly. Refrain to give information as much as possible."

Along the way, Julis was giving a warning.

"Roger.....But I'm a little anxious. To believe that we can't even activate our weapons."

"What, I have laid the installation type ability, so there's no problem. Even if the other party is to break in, he will go bang."

Julis, who expressed the explosion by opening her fist, fearlessly smiled.

"Anyway, we were able to preserve the first round with this without showing our link pattern. I want to go on like this."

What Ayato and Julis wanted to cover above all was that there was a limit to Ayato's best state (full strength). Though among those, who directly watched Ayato's duel, there might be some who had vaguely noticed, he wanted to avoid to make it deterministic (definite) as much as possible. From that perspective, he also wanted to conceal the flow of the seal release as much as possible, but if he were to release it before appearing in the stage, it would not last that much time. In that case, in the two's conclusion, openly doing it would be better as to let the audience think that that was a part of the performance, according to their plan. Of course, they did not think that such a mean would work forever, but it would be better if it was exposed as late as possible.

And then, what the two wanted to conceal after the limit was their coordinated attack pattern. It was only about two months that Ayato and Julis made a tag. Although they wanted to polish their coordination as much as possible, it was undeniable that it paled in comparison to that of a pair, which was formed for years.

Leaving aside the opponent's level this time, against an opponent with a level, which can accommodated Ayato, who released the seal, a coordinated attack would after all become the key for the victory. They wanted to keep it as much as possible.

"At least we won't confront strong candidates during the qualifier. Until the final stage (main battle), we must put on airs as much as possible."

While advancing in the passage toward the interview space, Julis said so with a serious expression opposite to the way of talking.

---

".....Phew, we are back—"

"Good grief....."

Ayato and Julis, who returned to the waiting room, sat down on the sofa, completely exhausted.

"W-Welcome back! Congratulations to both of you!"

".....Why are you so tired? Even though it was an instant win."

Since Kirin and Saya, who welcomed them, were wonderingly looking at both of them, Ayato answered with a bitter smile.

"No, the match was not that much. However, the audience after it was....."

"The mass media guys outside were really persistent. If this, our journalism club is far better."

With a tedious face, Julis gulped down the drink, which Kirin held out, in one go.

In fact, when it came to after the match the winner interview, there was nothing more tiring than it. About Ayato's performance and Ser-Versta of course, the details of his relationship and participation with Julis, and on top of that his favorite food, and private questions which had nothing to do with the match, they were forced to keep company on and on for nearly one hour. It was also probably that, which shove away their energy.

"Ooh, those are nice words."

A voice suddenly came from the wall side.

"Oh, Eishiro. You came, huh."

"First of all, congratulations for the victory in the first match."

As Eishiro said so smilingly, he took a photo of both of them with the terminal in his hands.

"—I will say this just in case, but by simply saying that it's relatively better, it doesn't mean that I particularly became friendly to you guys."

"Yeah, yeah, the princess is strict as usual."

To Julis' sullen face, Eishiro shrugged his shoulders exaggeratedly.

Though anyone could come and go to the waiting room if the user player was given permission by a human, unless the lock was removed from the inside, the door would not open. Since this time, permission were given only to Saya and Kirin, these two people probably invited him.

"So, what's wrong? You didn't come just to cheer us, right?"

It was already August. Most students, who did not participate in the Phoenix, were in summer vacation.

Even Asterisk, which did not usually easily hand down passes, was as expected making an exception with long vacation, and there were many students going home. But, since there were hardly few students like Eishiro staying at the academy, from a general perspective it seemed to be about fifty-fifty<sup>[15]</sup>.

"Hahaha, I wouldn't need to cheer you with people of that level as your opponents. My aim today is — the third match."

".....I see, Allekant, huh."

Julis nodded in the way agreeing.

"Oh yeah, the announcement made at the opening ceremony had made my journalist soul boil. Whoever has heard that would understand that it was about those two of Allekant. That being the case, I immediately went to the waiting room of those two for an interview, but....."

"Did you find something, Yabuki?"

Saya briskly walked to the front of Eishiro, and intently looked up straight at him.

"It's a complete shutout. There is a heavy security so as to not let even one cat pass; I was flatly sent away."

".....What!"

Saya, disappointed, dropped her shoulders.

"Well, there is no need to rush. Even if we leave them alone, the third match will start very soon."

"Eh? Speaking of time, isn't the match of Lester and Randy soon, too?"

"Ah, yes. If I'm not mistaken, since McPhail-senpai and Randy-senpai should have their match in Capella Dome....."

As Kirin turned on the TV and matched the channel, the big frame of Lester, who set Bardiche Leo, was projected just in the space screen.

"Hmm, it seems to have already begun."

"Thank goodness.....seemingly they are dominant."

As to support Lester from the rear, the several arrows shot by Randy were continuously attacking the opponent. As they were friends of long date, their very good coordination was balanced.

"If the match days were different, I would have gone to cheer them."

"Stop it. You would only be sent away."

To Ayato's mutter, Julis laughed as making fun of him.

".....But those two are doing quite good."

Saya seemed to be impressed by Randy's shooting skills.

"Oh well, McPhail is a Top Twelve, and his partner Randy Hook, in a sense, also has the experience of an up-and-coming student. And he uses it accordingly."

"The opponent is a pair of Allekant."

Lester efficiently used his inborn power control, and overwhelmed his two opponents at the same time. Once in this partner, Lester was strong. Even the rear support of Randy also exquisite, had skillfully restrained the opponents, who tried to escape from Lester's reach.

As everyone was somehow or other watching Lester and Randy's match, a thunderous sound like the earth tremor suddenly reverberated through the wall.

"Wow!?"

Though Ayato and the others instinctively looked at each other, they immediately discovered the origin of that sound.

It was cheers.

"Wait, damn it! It has already begun, huh!?"



Eishiro hurriedly unfolded another space screen.

Indeed, if the hall was this much lively, there was but one reason for it.

Cheers, as to shake the earth, did not seem to settle down, and it seemed that excitement and enthusiasm, and above all surprise were spreading more than when Ayato and Julis adorned their spectacular debut earlier.

"—Tch!"

What was projected by the space screen, which started up, was as expected — the figure of two machine dolls.

## Chapter 3 - Ardi and Rimsi

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The two puppets standing on the stage of Sirius Dome — one of them had a figure similar to a battle puppet. However, you could say that it was two times bigger than the ones normally operated. With a stature easily exceeding two meters, its form, which was clad in armor, looked like a machine-made knight.

And the other puppet in contrast, was mostly similar to a human — and moreover, had an outward appearance, which was not discernible to that of a human woman. Its features were too perfectly arranged, and its delicate figure was wrapped in an armored-like metallic suit.

Both of them were adorned with the school badge "Dusk Owl" of Allekant Academy on the chest.

『Well, well, finally the new model puppets of Allekant took off its veil! This time.....though they are the substitutes of the contestants, err, Ernesta Kuhne and Camilla Pareto — actually, how do you see it, Châm-san?』

『Let's see. Because of my line of work, I also happened to be engaged in countless arguments with battle puppets, but if based on that, however much its efficiency is improved, honestly I don't think they could stand against a Starpulse Generation. Even though the battle puppets up to now were, for the most, operated by humans from the exterior, they would never match us regarding the reaction speed. Since no matter what, a time lag would be generated in response.』

『I see, I see. But then, what about the puppets of this time, which are autonomy type? 』

『Hmm, certainly, they have self-consciousness.....or perhaps should I say an AI<sup>[16]</sup> of a level where self-judgment is possible and put in practical use for the time being, but still I have never seen that they possess the ability to make judgment at the level of Starpulse Generation in combat.』

『Hahaha, I see. But, the regulations were expressly revised so as to insert these two puppets! So we can expect that it would surely not be only this level, right.....and oh, excuse me for a moment.....yes, yes, I see.....Err, ahem! Excuse me! Just now, information regarding the two puppets was delivered to the live seat. And moreover it is from the developer, the contestant Ernesta Kuhne!』

『E~eh, well it's a nice service.』

『By all means, it said "today, I am hereby lifting the ban on information". Oh, and then, according to this information, the name of the big one is autonomy type puppet prototype AR-D alias Ardi, and the female type is autonomy type puppet prototype RM-C alias Rimsi.』

『Just in case, does 'substitute participation' mean that it is better to put up a contestant? 』

『Hahaha, I wonder how it is. Well, that aside, there are also a lot of information, which seem interesting, for example.....』

While listening to the commentator and reporter, the rank #12, the <Spiral Magician(Septentrio)> of Le Wolfe Black Institute, Moritz, who was facing Ardi and Rimsi, annoyingly clucked.

"Hmph, I don't like that.....! That the likes of machine puppets attracted attention in vain....."

Though the appearance of Moritz with ruffled black hair was like a dead tree, his expression was strangely sharp. His tone was polite, and he was firmly wearing his uniform, which was something unusual for a student of Le Wolfe.

Though the lowest seat in the Top Twelve of Le Wolfe, he should have originally gathered the public attention as one of the major contenders, but the leading actor on this stage was evident for everyone.

"To treat me like a stalking horse, I see that even the administration does sometimes screw around.....!"

".....So, aniki<sup>[17]</sup>, what do we do?"

Moritz's tag partner Gerd, who spat out so from behind him, accosted him in a low voice while activating his Lux. His sturdy build was dignifiedly shouldering an assault rifle, which he held in his hands with experience.

Though Moritz was a leader of a group of dozens of people in Le Wolfe, Gerd was one of the the most skilled even among the underlings. Thanks to his excellent shooting skills, they managed to reach the main battle (final stage) with this tag even in the last Phoenix. Above all, his obedient and taciturn side was also pleasant.

"There is no need to ask. We do as usual. For the time being, you have to devote yourself as the backup."

After all, since there was no data at all of the opponents, he could not set up a strategy. Though each academy also sometimes prepared a hidden card for the Festa, and it was also not unusual that there were opponents with no data on them, nevertheless this time was a too much rare case.

—That and.

"You humans there! Listen well!"

In a sound volume as to shake the air like an electric shock, Ardi, which folded his arms, spoke towards Moritz and Gerd.

"I stand in this battlefield in the command of my great master! And at the same time, my long-cherished desire is not to attain victory itself, but to make known my dignified appearance that was granted by master! Therefore, I want you to become a cornerstone that showed that evidence!"

Broad-minded to the extent of not believing that a machine could talk, and yet it was an extremely arrogant tone.

Ignoring Moritz, who was taken aback, Ardi further continued to speak.

"I will give you one minute of time. In the meantime, I will not move even one finger. You should freely set an attack."

To these words, veins ran to Moritz's temple, and he fell into a blank stare.

"Y-You bastards——!"

But, the moment that the enraged Moritz took a step forward, a light bullet exploded in the temporal region of Ardi's head. A dull sound reverberated and Ardi's head slightly swayed.

".....It hurts, Rimsi."

"Shut up."

As Ardi blamed in a sullen voice, Rimsi standing nearby coldly replied without even looking at him. Before one knew it, a large handgun type Lux was grasped in her hand.

"Yeesh, you brainless dull idiotic ignorant hunk of metal. With what kind of authority do you voice such bullshit? If you have so much energy to spit out such worthless grumbling, you should use it for master's sake. We should just faithfully and reliably carry out master's command. Even now, you can

return to the lab and receive maintenance. About your head, got it? Oh, but then, since you will cause trouble to master, you should rather break and perish here. If you want, I may lend you a hand for that."

Like Ardi.....no, it was more fluent tone. However, this one seemed to be more machine-like with no emotions.

By the way in a Festa, launching an attack before the match start was announced was a foul act of immediate disqualification, but in case of one's teammate becoming one's opponent, it would not be restricted.

"Even you say so, Rimsi. If fellows of this level are our opponents, our superiority — will not be eventually enough to make them understand however much a noble grand existence master is. If so, I judge that something like an effective performance was necessary, but....."

"Certainly, it is a splendid idea to make known master's greatness. Let's evaluate that point."

"That's right, that's right!"

Ardi repeatedly nodded contentedly.

"Hmm.....? No, then why did you shoot me?"

"Because I was somehow pissed."

Rimsi flatly asserted with her deadpan as it is.

".....Unh, then it cannot be helped."

Ardi kept quiet while rubbing the shot mark.

As Rimsi sighed by seeing it, she turned towards Moritz and Gerd.

"Well, humans. Even though it was bullshit from a defective trash machine, if I were to revoke what he had already said, it would bring disgrace to master. Therefore, though I am reluctant, I also promise that for one minute I will not attack."

To these words, as he had already passed his anger, a light amazed and mocking smile floated on Moritz's face.

".....Ha-hahaha! Is that so, then I will take upon your offer without reservation."



If carefully thinking about it, there was no need to get angry if the opponent was expressly willing to present a disadvantageous condition. Though he did not like how they were underestimated, such a thing was trivial when compared to a win in the Festa.

"Gerd, you take care of the thinner one. I will take care of the big one."

".....Roger."

Gerd who was in the rear slightly nodded.

『Well now, it kind of became something amazing; but it's almost the start time! A showcase match; which tag will emerge victorious?』

Almost at the same time with the live, which heralded so, the school badges declared the match start.

"Phoenix block H first round pair, match start!"

As soon as the match started, Moritz rushed straight from the front towards Ardi.

Gust of wind, which suddenly arose, clung to both his arms, and formed drill-shaped triangular pyramids.

This was Moritz's ability as Dante — the <Spiralling Gale(Boreas Spira)>, which scooped out all things. Though it was an ability which did not effectively work in practical use, if looking at the only aspect of simple destructive power, there was no doubt that it was top class ability even in Le Wolfe.

Rather, the too high offensive ability and the strange aggressiveness were to the extent to be penalized as atrocities (cruelty).

However, fortunately the opponents this time were not humans. So he could exercise his ability to his heart's content.

(If I have one minute, then it's enough. I will make (do) you scrap in no time.....!)

The drill-shaped wind raised a roar, and increased its rotation.

As declared, Ardi did not show sign of moving and remained with his arms folded.

"Hahaha, what a good courage! As you desire, I will make a wind hole in those guts!"

Moritz's right arm let out to pierce the abdomen of Ardi, who had a daunting pose.

—However.

"Wha-!?"

The blow was prevented by a wall of translucent light that appeared without any warning in front of Ardi. It was a thin rectangle of about one meter wide and two meters height. It looked like a space screen at first glance, but unlike it, it seemed to somehow possess a physical interference power.

"Damn it! But don't think that such a thing would continue defending against my power!"

The <Spiralling Gale(Boreas Spira)> in Moritz's arm raised a roar, and further increased its rotation.

Sparks scattered as if dancing, and a shrill fricative sound-like a cry reverberated.

—Even so, the wall did not budge.

"—It is useless."

Ardi arrogantly declared.

In that declaration, honesty to tell an undeniable fact and clear self-confidence were coexisting.

"Tch! Then.....!"

As Moritz instantly sneaked around behind Ardi, he drove the <Spiralling Gale(Boreas Spira)> aiming at the back this time.

(I don't know of what kind of structure it was made, but if I attack from a blind spot, then...!)

In order to take full advantage of his ability itself, which specialized in close combat, Moritz also had a high level of taijutsu<sup>[18]</sup>. From the opponent's perspective, his flowing movements should only be seen as if they

disappeared. Though he launched blow with absolute confidence — the result betrayed him.

"!?"

The wall of light, which suddenly appeared as a while ago, deflected Moritz's attack.

As expected, Ardi did not move an inch. Of course, he was not even looking towards Moritz.

"—Another 45 seconds."

At that moment, Moritz felt an indescribable shiver, and promptly took a distance.

Cold sweat streamed down his back.

He wondered if perhaps he was not having terrifying things as opponents right now.

As such a thought crossed his mind, Moritz shook his head as to drive it away.

"Gerd, Strategy change! Here....."

As he started to speak until there, Moritz looked back and opened his eyes wide.

Gerd, who was facing the other puppet — Rimsi, seemed to have a fierce gun battle. They mutually set up large gun type Lux, and countless light bullets were flying about between them.

But, looking closely, it was always from Gerd that attacks were launched; Rimsi was only shooting his bullets as to fight back.

—No, wrong.

Rimsi was not fighting back. She was just defending against shooting by shooting.

Normally, when light bullets of Lux collided into each other, as long as there was no great amount of energy difference, they would just disappear. However, of course aiming expressly at it was virtually impossible. Moreover, being able to shoot all the bullets scattered with a semi-auto, was already the domain of superhuman feat.

Rimsi was managing it with a cool face, without moving one step.

"Such a thing.....is impossible!"

Also in the voice of the usually calm Gerd, impatience was spreading.



While changing the distance and moving around, he waited for an opening and shot a rain of light bullets — but still, nothing got through.

"—Another 30 seconds."

Moritz, who was looking at that spectacle agape, came to his senses after being startled by Ardi's voice.

Both Ardi and Rimsi were devoting themselves to the defense, exactly like they declared.

If this were to turn to an attack.....?

"Uoooooooooooh!"

Moritz concentrated his prana, and raised a cry as to brush aside the fear born in him.

(Then, I just have to crush him within the time!)

A stormy wind raged around Moritz; it converged and a tornado like dragon rose up. The pointed end became a <Spiralling Gale(Boreas Spira)> with the shape of the drill, and started to pull out only the core of the giant drill.

The audience rustled to the bold move, which shook the air.

"<Rending Gale(Boreas Mordent)>!"

Moritz's trump card was a special skill. Though there were not many opportunities to use it from the fact that the control was difficult, the consumption of prana was intense, and above all, the attack speed was painfully slow to hit the opponent, if only considering the destructive power, he had pride that it was the greatest in Le Wolfe.

"Eat this!"

Moritz shook his arms, and in accordance with it the tornado moved so as to wriggle the dragon; it rushed on at a stretch aiming at Ardi.

As a while ago, the wall of light, which suddenly manifested, intercepted it. Intense sparks, as if a small explosion occurred, danced down, and a shrill sound as the rubbing of metal pierced the ears.

Nevertheless still, Ardi did not move.

"Ooooooooooh!"



Moritz poured prana as much as he could have to the <Rending Gale(Boreas Mordent)>.

However — the wall of light did not shake.

Though for a while the tornado was violently twisting like a dragon rampaging..... the wind began to weaken little by little before long, and its rotation gradually became loose.

"Haa.....Haa....."

As he used up his prana, Moritz, heavily breathing, weakly sat down.

Though Ardi, with a daunting pose, was looking down at such Moritz, he suddenly unfolded his arms and said.

"—One minute."

As he activated the Lux with his hand at the same time, a huge hammer as much as Ardi's height appeared. Its head was as thickly big as that when Moritz widened both his hands.

"It is time!"

As Ardi came walking to Moritz with slow and heavy steps, he lightly raised the hammer.

Moritz looked up at it while sinking down to the floor; he could no longer do anything but to reveal cramp laughter.

When he turned his gaze aside for an instant, Gerd was already lying down on the ground.

".....You monsters!"

The hammer was swung down at the same time that Moritz muttered so—

"End of the match! Winner, Ernesta Kuhne & Camilla Pareto!"

In the hall that fell silent as if striking water, the mechanical sound, which told the conclusion of the match, echoed.

All the spectators present in the audience were agape.

Hurried footsteps resounded after a short time; it was the medical staff dispatched from the Medical Center, which came to carry out Moritz and Gerd with pale faces.

Afterwards finally, thunderous applause and cheers poured down over the stage.

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『This-This is a big surprise! The time it took to settle the match is just one minute! No, if it's that much, it isn't something rare. In fact, today's second match was settled more quickly. However, we could say that the one minute, in which we had witnessed a glimpse of ability of contestant Ardi and contestant Rimsi, was really dense, yet rich! Don't tell me those two — oh, for convenience, "those two" referred to contestant Ardi and contestant Rimsi; anyway, to think that those two have that much combat ability.....』

"—Good grief, they had been completely eaten."

When Julis said so and turned off the TV, she took a deep breath and sank herself in the sofa.

Ayato included, also both Kirin and Saya had a face, which showed that they did not yet come to believe what they saw.

"Well, I guess today's top news will be this, definitely. Otherwise, it would be princess and Ayato."

Even Eishiro, who said so, had an expression that could not hide his surprise.

"But, to think that that < Spiral Magician(Septentrio) > was completely helpless.....it was indeed surprising."

"Y-You are right.....if we are to confront those two, I think that they will be formidable enemies."

To Kirin, who muttered in a thin voice, Julis slowly shook her head.

"No, if it is only about winning, we as well as you can properly deal with people of Moritz's level. The problem is not there."

".....It's as Riessfeld said."

Then Saya nodded as to agree with it.

"That wall of light. That is troublesome."

"I don't know what kind of trick is used for it, but judging from the fact that it completely defend against Moritz's ability, average offensive abilities would not be able to break through."

As it became troublesome, Julis rested her chin on her hand.

"Perhaps that wall of light is an application of a defense barrier.....is what I think."

"When you say defense barrier, do you refer to something similar to what is put around this stage? But that should be a really large-scale device....."

To the surroundings of the stage, a defense wall was set up in order to protect the audience from stray bullets or emergency accidents and the like; but a large quantity of energy and a large-scale system were necessary for that.

"Perhaps it is miniaturized so as to let it activate restrictively....."

"Indeed. Well, since I'm going there to listen to what they say, I will ask."

Eishiro said so and stood up from the sofa.

"You say you will ask, but.....how?"

"It's soon the winner's interview, right? I will try to see if I can't creep in."

"Eh? B-But, they don't allow the students press there....."

While the outer press media were not allowed within the campus, in official events under the direct control of Asterisk such as the Festa, it was a principle to give priority to the off-campus press. There, people with student's status were probably not even allowed in the press conference room.

"Hehehe, doing something about it is what being a first-class journalist is. Well, just see."

To Kirin, who seemed to be anxious, Eishiro broadly laughed and left the waiting room with light steps

".....Well, if that guy learns any information that might be useful later, I will be thankful in that case. We should just wait without expecting much."

Exactly as stated, Julis had a face which showed that she was not expecting anything at all.

"—But, I want the data."

Saya muttered so with a serious expression.

"Yeah. It is first certain that we as well as those puppets would reach the final stage (main battle). We must collect as many information as we can until then."

While the other side had their data, it was indeed disadvantageous for them since they could collect data based only on today's match.

"If possible, I would like to watch the match directly."

Since the flow of prana and the movement of the mana could not be understood from a video, if it was possible, directly confirming it with her own eyes would be the best way. Though the ticket of the Festa, however lowest the seat was, was a special platinum ticket, the competitors could use the booth to watch the matches of any academy.

"That's, if possible. The first round aside, the match interval will become more and more short from now on. If there are matches on the same day like today, it will be difficult, too."

"Oh, I see."

If the match halls were different, it would be hard just to move, and even in the same hall, depending on the order of the matches they would not be able to watch a match leisurely.

".....Hmm, Excuse me a bit."

Suddenly, Saya took out a portable terminal.

She immediately opened a space window, but nothing was reflected in there. In case where the calling party had turned the video transmission off and that the receiver had turned it on, it would become like this. In other words, it was a form where her image reached the other side, but only the sound from the other side reached her side.

『Oh, Saya, huh! Hey, did you see it? The match now!』

".....I saw it."

『Fufufu, The producer of that — you did say she is called Ernesta Kuhne, right? She is good even though young! From just what I saw, more than five mana dices should have been used in those puppets. But instead to let them connect, the control is moist in the concomitance control (management) system around one core. Yeah, interesting indeed! They might hardly being controlled by humans, but if it is an AI, it will be theoretically possible!』

".....I understand. But, calm down a little."

『Hmm? Oh, sorry sorry!』

The voice of the man, who kept talking and suddenly got excited, was familiar to Ayato.

"Um.....is it perhaps Soichi-ojisan<sup>[19]</sup>?"

『Oh, Ayato-kun, huh! It's been a long time! I also watched your match! Uh-huh, it's great that you look fine.』

That joyful voice was certainly that of Sasamiya Soichi, Saya's father, who lived in the neighbor.

(Eh.....?)

However, at the same time Ayato felt a little uncomfortable to that voice. Something subtle that felt unnatural.

"Ayato. So that means that this is....."

"Ah, yeah. It is Saya's father."

As he answered so to Julis, who asked in a low voice, Kirin next to Saya quickly bowed her head.

"U-Um! Nice to meet you! I am the tag partner of Saya in this Phoenix, Toudou Kirin!"

『Oh, of the Toudou school! I have heard rumors; she is an incompetent daughter, but please take care of her!』

"Y-Yeah! It is my pleasure!"

".....So father. What do you want?"

With a slightly embarrassed expression, Saya urged.

『Oh! Oh, yes that's right! I sent you a new gun; hasn't it arrived yet?』

"A new gun.....? No, it hasn't arrived."

『Hmm.....perhaps, it has been stopped at the customs house. Try to check it. I thought you have received it before the Phoenix, but at this rate, it's unlikely to be in time for the first round.』

"No problem. With the current armaments, I can fully win through."

As Saya confidently said so with a serious face, Soichi's voice happily laughed.

『Hmm, of course! As long as you use my gun, there is no way you would lose! Then, good luck! I'll expect good results!』

As he kept talking one-sidedly, the space window disappeared. This part of him had not really changed.

(Was it my imagination.....?)

Ayato was bothered a little by the uncomfortable feeling of earlier, but since it was nowhere yet concrete<sup>[20]</sup>, he decided to put it aside for the time being.

"How surprising.....it is a talkative father unlike his daughter, Sasamiya."

"I have stopped that. If I have left it, he might be talking all day long."

When Saya said so, she closed her portable terminal and left her seat.

".....Well. I'll go to the customs a little bit for confirmation."

"Oh, then I will go, too!"

Like that, Saya and Kirin left the room together.

Ayato and Julis, who were left, looked at each other.

".....So, what do we do?"

"Let's see. For the time being, a toast in celebration of the victory of the first match.....is what I would like to say, but I can't say such a leisurely thing when we were shown such a thing by Allekant."

As Julis stood up with a wry smile, she held out her hand to Ayato, who was sitting.



"Let's go back to the school and train even a little. The second round is in four days anyway. We must thoroughly do it."

".....Roger."

As Ayato similarly revealed a wry smile, he took her hand.

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"Hi, hi, both of you, good work! It was a nice performance."

In the corridor and heading toward the press conference room, Ernesta welcomed Ardi and Rimsi with a big smile.

"Thank you, master."

"Fuhahaha! Well, this much is natural!"

Whereas Rimsi respectfully got down on a knee, Ardi with his arms crossed heartily laughed.

Rimsi, who saw it in side glance, gave Ardi a sharp tripping up as if creeping on the ground.

"Whoa!"

Ardi, who nearly collapsed, tried to recover his balance with quickness unexpected from his large build, but his head was forcibly slammed on the ground by Rimsi, who hopped on his back even faster.

"Umph.....!"

Ardi tried to raise his body, but she did not budge at all.

"What is that attitude towards master? You should be ashamed."

"It hurts, Rimsi. You were serious, right?"

"Of course. There is no need to hold back to a fool, who is rude to master."

Rimsi's voice was cold, but a clear anger could be felt there.

Ernesta seeing it nodded contentedly.

Machines, which analyzed the situation and carried out self-judgment, were not that unusual. There were also already machines, which

possessed the thing called 'free will'. What Ernesta wanted to make was machines, which possessed emotions and could express them.

At that point, while being prototypes, Ardi and Rimsi were already close to Ernesta's ideal form.

"Now, now, leave it at that, Rimsi. It's not as if Ardi really means anything bad. More importantly, if we don't reach the press conference room soon, Camilla would get tired of waiting."

".....If master says so."

As Ernesta calmed her, Rimsi reluctantly released her hand.

The autonomous behavior was perfect and various numerical values were stable, too. It was going well almost too smoothly.

As she got wind of the matter of the other day, the guys of the <Supreme Faction> could not afford to make a bad move for a while, since they seemed to be watched by guards. There was also no concern towards the environment.

As Ernesta chuckled, Ardi stood up and tilted his thick head to the side.

"By the way, master. I have a question."

"Yes, what is it?"

"Rimsi and I should not be that much different on the specs output, right?"

"Right. Well, since the physique difference was made of due to the allocation and the equipment of the output, there is quite a difference in the actual work data."

Ernesta leisurely replied while walking.

"Then, why may I not fight against Rimsi?"

"Oh, there is no help for it. The reason is, 『The woman commands nature to preserve the highest completion, and the man commands nature to most optimally fulfill the woman's desires』 . Even old people say good things."

It were the famous words of an old dramatist.

"In this world, the woman comes first. It means that you guys also cannot escape from that destiny."

"In other words, since I am a male type, I cannot win against Rimsi, who is a woman type?"

"It would be so."

".....Uh-huh, then it cannot be helped."

Of course, there was no way that was true.

Ernesta stuck out her tongue in her mind.

That Ardi could not go against Rimsi was exactly because he was setting Rimsi as safety.

Otherwise, it would be dangerous.

"—Certainly, all the past winners of the Festa were mostly women."

Rimsi, who was apparently searching past data, followed so.

"Is that so", Ernesta inwardly admired. Since she was not that interested in the Festa, she had never checked such data.

"Well, even the <Venomous Witch> of Le Wolfe, who is the history's strongest and famous is a girl. Besides, there are also scary children, who came out from Le Wolfe in this Phoenix, right?"

While saying so, Ernesta slightly tightened her face.

She was thinking that it would be the boy of Seidokan, who would become her biggest obstacle in this tournament, but there were also some troublesome pairs, who were participating as well. Even this tournament, which was said to be relatively full of small grains<sup>[21]</sup> in advance reviews, had gathered quite the lineup, which could not be taken lightly, when looking at the actual situation. In the end, it meant that there was no such Festa, in which one could easily win through.

Though she did not even consider the possibility of Ardi and Rimsi losing, she could also not deny that there were opponents, who would be somewhat troublesome.

"It would save me if they properly fight though."

As Ernesta said so, she looked up at the ceiling and slightly smiled wryly.

## Chapter 4 – The Violent Vampire Princess(Lamilexia)

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—Phoenix second day, Central District Commercial Area Outer Edge.

"Um, Procyon Dome.....Oh, it's that."

As one shifted his attention to that direction and confirmed the space flag lightly floating, a dome-shaped roof let its head peek on the other side of the buildings standing in a row with a wave of people. It was one of the three large-scale stages existing in Asterisk, commonly known as the Procyon Dome. In addition to this, there were seven middle-scale stages; the largest main stage, where Ayato and Julis had their match was one, and the qualifier of the Phoenix was held in eleven stages in total. Furthermore, it seemed that among the four large-scale stages and main stage from the final stage (main battle), only the main stage would be used after the semifinals.

In order to cheer for the match of Saya and Kirin, Ayato and Julis were on their way towards the Procyon Dome.

"Still, there is really an amazing number of people....."

With the crowd filling the street to the extent one could even barely advance straight, he once again realized the greatness of Asterisk as a tourist city.

Cafes and restaurants facing the street were all full; that there were a lot of people, who opened space windows, was probably because everybody was watching the match broadcast. Since day tickets were probably also prepared slightly depending on the halls, there might have been people, who failed in getting it.

"During the period of Festa, the population density around here usually increased dozens of times. It can't be helped."

Even Julis, who said so, revealed a fed-up face.

After all, in addition to the fact that their advance through the crowd was slow, as they were walking, they were suddenly also accosted, or cheered, or asked handshakes and autographs, and they were delayed in unexpected cases.

"Although the puppets of Allekant nabbed the topic, there is no doubt that you also achieved a fully striking debut. After all unlike those in the academy, the fans of outside haven't many opportunities to directly meet students."

Though on the other hand, there were also fans, who occasionally called out to Julis, she turned down all of them in a familiar attitude (like she usually did).

It would be easier if Ayato could also do so, but since just refusing would be painful, as expected he could not do it.

"\*sigh\*.....I wonder how long this will take."

Even though there was only just a short distance from the subway station to the Procyon Dome, this thing was certainly at a snail's pace.

In addition, under the blazing sun of midsummer, the sunlight, which slowly burned the skin, was of a merciless intensity, and Ayato wiped the sweat spouted out with his sleeve.

"Their match was the second match, right? If so, then, we can afford a little more.....Hmm?"

As Julis, who was fanning herself, said up to there, she turned a suspicious look ahead. When Ayato similarly looked at the same direction, for some reason the movement of people was delayed around there.

And there were also hustle and bustle and people's angry voices, which could be faintly heard.

"What, when I was wondering why it was not progressing, it is due to some kind of trouble, huh....."

There were also people running away towards this place, and they did not seem to be that much calm.

As Ayato and Julis looked at each other and nodded, they pushed their way through the crowd of people, trying to advance.

When they arrived to the front row, several men were surrounding a girl standing in the middle of the street. Since they were all wearing the uniform of Le Wolfe, Ayato almost instinctively raised his guard, but — this was because he had been attacked from a similar situation before —

looking closely, several male students were already lying on the ground. It seemed like to be really trouble.

Though saying it, honestly the ability difference between the girl and the men was evident. The girl was barehanded knocking down one after another the men wielding a Lux. A muffler was rolled around her neck in this heat, and it was fluttering about in the wind as if dancing along with the girl's movements.

".....That woman is the Violent Vampire Princess(Lamilexia)."

"Huh?"

That nickname also rang a bell to Ayato.

She was the rank #3 of Le Wolfe — and among the participants in this Phoenix, the player named by Julis to be the most troublesome opponent.

If he remembered correctly, her name was.....

"—Irene Urzaiz, I wonder what she is doing here at such a time.....I don't think she is sane."

Julis muttered with a genuinely amazed face.

However, also, during the period of the Festa, duels in urban areas were naturally altogether prohibited. Of course, it was in concern for the safety of people coming from outside.

If in a place with a defense barrier, they (duels) would be allowed, but then it would be restricted in medium to large stages. However, since those stages were all used in the Festa, it was substantially the same as to say that duels could only be done within campus during the qualifier period.

And then, since duels were prohibited, such scuffles were of course absurd. If a Festa participant was involved in it, there was no doubt that he or she would be imposed a suitable penalty. If he/she were to be reckless, he/she might even be deprived of the entry qualifications.

"Geez, you're persistent, dude. Nowadays trying to settle a score isn't prevalent."

In the meantime, Irene tidied up most of the men. From the nearly ten men, who were there, only one was remaining.

"S-Shut up! Otherwise my honor will never stand!"



The man, while backing away, barked as to bite.

"With just one or two casinos crushed, you're narrow-minded people, dude. In the first place, your cheating was the cause. Besides, if you're that much selfish, you'll be scolded by that small fatty, you know?"

"As if I care about that damn president! We've our own way to—"

"Geez, you're annoying."

Before the man finished speaking, Irene's roundhouse kick hit him to the temporal region.

While looking down with cold eyes at the man, who soundlessly collapsed, Irene heaved a deep breath.

It was not a movement of someone, who learned some martial arts. It was a flexible and animalistic taijutsu.

"Ora! It ain't a show!"

Though Irene cried towards the gallery surrounding them, her gaze, which was turned around, exactly stopped to Ayato.

"Ah?"

She fixedly stared at Ayato's face with sharp eyes.

"E~eh.....as expected, it's the <Murakumo>, huh. This is good, it saves me trouble."

Irene let her sharp fangs peep out from her mouth and grinned.

It seemed like she somehow knew about Ayato.

As she briskly came walking, she looked at Ayato so as to appraise him. He did not really understand, but since he did not feel hostility, he remained just as it is for the time being; Irene soon scornfully laughed as to scoff him.

"Hmm, it's this, eh....."

"Do you want something from my tag partner, Violent Vampire Princess(Lamilexia)?"

Julis broke in there with a displeased voice.

"—The <Petalblaze Witch>(Gruene Rose), huh. I've no business with you. Get away."

"I can't do that. Since people like you like to pull off scuffles during the period of the Festa, and what's more, doing so in this crowd is extremely dangerous."

To these words, Irene's eyes abruptly tapered.

"That was a fight that the other side has provoked. It's not as if I started it."

"Even if it's the case, it isn't reasonable to fight back in such a place."

A threatening atmosphere gradually spread.

Isn't this somewhat a bad situation?

"W-Wait, Julis.....!"

"Interesting. Then, show me what you should have done in such a situation!"

As Irene said so, she took a Lux from the holder on her waist and activated it.

"—Tch!?"

Ayato and Julis instantly took distance, and put themselves on guard.

The next moment, a huge scythe so long that it exceeded her height manifested in Irene's hands.

Its purple blade was somewhat sinister, and it was clad in an ominous atmosphere.

"E~eh, it's a better reaction than I expected. I see, people can't only be judged by appearance."

"That's..... the Bloody Scythe of Supreme Destruction(Gravi-Sheath)."

Ayato swallowed his saliva.

—An Ogre Lux of Le Wolfe for scholarship that manipulated gravity.

Due to the fact that the compatibility rating appeared rather high for anyone, which was unusual for an Ogre Lux, it was said to have wreaked havoc in Festa on countless occasions in the past.

In fact, the number of people, who were able to effectively use it, was equal to none. It was still unknown how it was for Irene, but.....

"We are pulling back, Ayato."

".....I know!"

As expected, they could not duel here.

"I see, at such times, you would choose to run away, huh. Smart thinking!"



Though Irene was cacklingly laughing, a ferocious light suddenly shone in her pupils and she set up the Bloody Scythe of Supreme Destruction(Gravi-Sheath).

"—Well, that's if you can run away."

A shuddering bloodlust was released, and the atmosphere strained in an instant.

A tension that one would immediately be cut if losing focus.

Even the gallery surrounding them uniformly kept silent and attentively watched the course of events.

—However.

"Koraa————!"

Then suddenly, an out-of-place voice echoed.

"Onee-chan<sup>[22]</sup>, you are fighting again! Even though I told you many times to behave yourself, geez!"

The owner of the voice was a girl who appeared from the crowd with a staggering threatening attitude.

Her hair, which hung down in a braided cord, was the same color as Irene's, and their looks were also very similar. She was also wearing the uniform of Le Wolfe.

"Crap! Pr-Priscilal.....!"

"When I was wondering why you suddenly disappeared .....Why did it become like this? Explain, Onee-chan!"

"N-No, that's, you see....."

Though Ayato and Julis were blankly watching at the two's exchange, the girl soon noticed their gazes and hurriedly bowed her head.

"I am sorry! For all the trouble that my sister has caused you.....!"

"Ah, no, it's nothing....."

As Julis was completely taken aback, she just returned a subtle answer.

"Hey, apologize, too, Onee-chan!"

"W-What do I have.....!"

"It's good, just apologize!"

".....Yea, I-I understand."

When Irene, who was scolded by the girl, stared at Ayato and Julis with a frustrating face, she slightly bowed her head reluctantly.

"M-My bad.....hey, let's go."

"Hey! You should properly apologize!"

As the girl put her hand on Irene's head, she deeply bowed her head along with Irene's head.

"I am really sorry. Well, I have already advised her."

And the girl apologetically said so, pulled Irene and disappeared into the crowd.

"....."

It seemed that not only Ayato and Julis, but also the gallery was speechless.

".....Ah, if I'm not mistaken, that child now was.....Irene Urzaiz's tag partner, right?"

".....Y-Yeah. Since she was calling Irene "Onee-chan," there is no mistake."

Though both Ayato and Julis had not yet completely pulled themselves together, still when they took out a portable terminal and confirmed the data, there was the face of the girl of earlier there.

Priscila Urzaiz. Irene Urzaiz's little sister and tag partner.

In fact, not only was there almost no data on her, but only her name and face were known.

"By the way — why did you behave like that earlier?"

"What are you talking about?"

As she pouted as she blamed Ayato, Julis feigning ignorance looked away.

"Don't play dumb. Even without such a provocative way of speaking, shouldn't it have been alright?"

Certainly, Irene was excessively belligerent, but if Julis did not break in, it might not have developed into such a dangerous situation.

Then, Julis sighed as if it could not be helped, and whispered to Ayato's ear in a low voice.

"Didn't you notice?"

"Huh.....?"

"Irene Urzaiz turned to me and said: 'I've no business with you'. It means that she would have complaint even if I did not get in the way. That means she definitively had a reason to aim at you."

"Even if you say so.....I'm not acquainted with her?"

It was no wonder she knew his name and face. It was evident that they would have data on them (Ayato and the others), and above all Ayato was currently the rank #1 of Seidokan. It was probably inevitable if he was targeted.

But, now that she mentioned it, he certainly felt that there was something implied in Irene's words.

"Le Wolfe would use any means for their purpose. It would be no wonder if they are scheming something bad."

"Hmm, well....."

Though he could not say that she was thinking too much about it, he knew that this city was a terrifying place.

"I wanted to investigate a little more on it, but.....well, it can't be helped. I never expected that they would seriously do this. I'm sorry."

Since Julis frankly bowed her head, Ayato hurriedly waved his hand.

"It's alright, it's alright — Oh yeah! More importantly, if we don't hurry, we will miss Saya's match!"

As he suddenly came to his senses and checked the time, there was almost already no time before the match start.



"Oh, that's right. For now, let's hurry to the hall."

Saying so and in a place where the two of them were heading towards Procyon Dome, they again noticed that it was noisy a little ahead on their way.

"Geez, what is it this time — that's bad! The guards, huh!"

Ahead where Julis stared with a wry face, two groups of men in uniform never seen pushed their way through the crowd and headed here.

"If it's the guards, then that means.....E~eh, so that's the Star Hunter Guards(Stjarnagarmr)."

It was an organization for the maintenance of public order, which acted as the police powers in Asterisk.

Although she had heard about them, it was actually the first time she saw them.

"As if it's the time to say carefree things! Let's quickly run away!"

Taking Ayato's hand, Julis ran to the opposite direction.

"No, but it's not as if we really did something....."

"I don't want to say it, but anyway those guys of the garrison are inflexible. Even if we convince them by explaining this disastrous scene, I don't know how much it will take."

Ayato, who was said to, looked around the men lying on the ground.

—I see; it would be indeed troublesome.

"Well.....It can't be helped."

Since the guards just came from the direction where Ayato and Julis took to head towards Procyon Dome, they were away from their destination, but there was no helping it.

"Hey! Wait a minute, you two there!"

Without looking back to the menacing voice, which flew from behind, Ayato and Julis escaped into an alley as they disappeared in the crowd.

---

"—Time is up."

"Right....."

The waiting room of Procyon Dome, when Saya and Kirin heaved a small sigh, they stood from the sofa. Since they heard that Ayato and Julis were coming to cheer them, they were waiting for them like this.

"I wonder if something happened....."

When Kirin, who was worried, muttered so, Saya received a call from her portable terminal.

『Sorry, Saya! We will be late due to some circumstances, but.....』

It was apparently from Ayato. For some reason, he was speaking in an unusually low voice.

Kirin, who was behind Saya, also looked at the space window.

".....The match will start."

『Indeed.....I'm sorry』

In the space window, Ayato hanged his head in disappointment.

"Well, it's fine. Anyway, when it's over, we will meet in the waiting room."

『Okay — then, good luck. Kirin-chan, too.』

"Yes!"

As Ayato lastly said so to Kirin while lightly winking, the space window disappeared.

Good luck.

With such a simple sentence, Kirin's expression, which was gloomy until a little while ago, turned to an expression completely full of motivations.

"Kirin, you looked surprisingly energetic."

"Huh? W-What?"

To the unexpected inquiry of Saya, Kirin was thrown into confusion with her face, which turned bright red.

Saya lightly tapped the back of such a Kirin, and quickly left the waiting room.

"Ah, p-please wait a minute, Saya-san!"

Kirin hurriedly ran after her, but Saya advanced in the passage with a laid-back pace.

"Huh.....Saya-san is really lax."

"I'm often told that."

As she revealed a wry smile and lined up with Saya, Saya was expressionless as usual; her fighting spirit could not be felt at all. While it was something enviable for the timid Kirin, she was so nervous that one wondered if it would be all right.

However.....for some reason, it felt somehow a little comfortable.

『And then! Here appeared the ex-rank #1 of Seidokan Academy, player Toudou Kirin and her partner, player Sasamiya Saya!』

When passing through the gate and entering the stage, a dazzling light and the reporter's voice with an awfully high tension welcomed the two girls.

『Speaking of player Toudou, despite being 13 years old, she is a super rookie, who took the position of rank #1 after only one month of enrolment! Although she fell from the position of rank #1 a few days ago, her ability is the real thing! No, even looking like this, her calm is indeed different, or perhaps should I say though small, that imperturbable attitude is.....』

『Nana-yan, Nana-yan, you're mistaken something. That smaller one is player Sasamiya. Then, it's rather the timid one next to her, who is the former rank #1.』

『Eeeh? Then, is that in high school? Seriously? Ah.....\*cough\*, it's very rude of me!』

『That's why I told you that you should properly look at the documents, geez.』

It seemed like the live reporter and the commentator of this hall were quite unique people.

".....It's extremely unpleasant."

"Hahaha....."

While muttering so with a sulky expression, Saya turned her gaze to the front.

There was a pair of male students standing side-by-side to the opposite side of the stage.

One was a thin young man with a line, which tied up his long hair behind his neck, and the other was a young man with a sturdy bald head. The school badge in their chest was the "Yellow Dragon" — in other words, they were students of World Dragon Seventh Institute.

World Dragon, which was the most heterogeneous of the six academies in Asterisk, had two peculiarities.

One was known as Star Senjutsu<sup>[23]</sup>, their unique mana-induction capability generalization technique.

The other was the promotion of thorough martial arts.

Even within World Dragon, various arts schools were jumbled together; although the arts schools, which dealt with weapons, were not few, as expected it would be barehanded advanced combat skills (technology) that should be known as synonym of World Dragon. Of course, an attack with bare hands was more disadvantageous than when using a weapon, but at the same time it was the only way that could directly transform prana to an offensive ability, and by combining it with a well-trained Taijutsu<sup>[24]</sup>, it showed an unparalleled strength in close combat.

Actually, as for the two men in front of Saya and Kirin, though the bald young man set a huge Blue Dragon katana<sup>[25]</sup> type Lux, the long-haired young man had no weapon.

"Both of them are non-ranked (outside of the list)<sup>[26]</sup>, but they seem to be quite strong."

World Dragon proud to be of the biggest scale among the six academies, was known for the fact that there were also many strong students, who were not recorded in the Named Charts. So Saya and Kirin could not take their opponents lightly.

".....Well, we will somehow manage."

However, no fighting spirit could be felt from Saya even though in this stage; she unfolded her Lux in her usual way.

A massive rustic gun appeared in her hands, and the audience made a stir. Though probably because the gun itself was too large compared to Saya's height, actually this was the comparatively smaller one among the Lux that Saya used. Still, it was slightly smaller than Saya's height though.

"Um, if I'm not mistaken, that is....."

"Type 34 wave Motion heavy artillery Ark Van Ders modified."

The Lux used by Saya amounted to about ten types, and Kirin had briefly witnessed all of them. Since they made a tag, one could say it was only natural for her to know them, but among them, honestly, there were also some, which also struck her dumb.

".....Which one would do?"

"Huh? Ah, let's see.....I'm fine with either."

For an instant, Kirin did not know what Saya was talking about, but she understood afterwards that she was speaking about which opponent she wanted to deal with.

"Then, I'll deal with the big one."

"Roger."

Which meant Kirin's opponent would be the long-haired young man.

As Kirin adjusted the distance, she slowly unsheathed her katana.

"Phoenix, block L first round two sets, match start!"

At the same time with the declaration of the match start, Kirin stepped into her opponent's range in one bound.

As if expecting it, the long-haired young man attacked by releasing a fist.

However — it was late.

As Kirin slipped through it, she aimed at his chest with a chop from a low position.

The young man struck the blade of the katana with his fist and brushed the attack away.

Kirin was unintentionally impressed at that heavy response. Certainly, the fist load with prana was indeed amazing. And though unarmed, his movement was consequently fast, and there was almost no opening in his attack and defense.

—But.

Even so, compared to Ayato's movement, it was still tepid.

Kirin altered the trajectory of her katana, which was repelled, by turning over her wrist, and connected (attacked) with a chop from an overhead position.

"Argh!"

Although the young man barely dodged it by twisting his body, he clearly broke his stance.

Nonetheless, he released a sharp kick out of desperation, but — Kirin easily dodged it and mowed down Senbakiri<sup>[27]</sup> directly horizontal.

Along with a clear feel of having broken a hard object, the school badge announced the young man's defeat.

"Whew....."

As she swung her katana and turned her back to the young man, who fell on his knees, the voice of the live reporter, which got excited, flew into the ears.

『F-Fast! I should say as expected of the former rank #1 of Seidokan, player Toudou, who controlled the battle in an instant! It's an instant conclusion!』

『Nana-yan! That one is good, but the smaller one is also interesting!』

To the voice of the commentator who broke in there, Kirin also turned her gaze towards Saya.

『Oops, you're right! Here is also a heated evenly balanced battle! And moreover! I thought that player Sasamiya would surely be in charge of the rearguard from that armament, but what's this, she's competing in hand-to-hand combat with all her might!』

—Right. Saya was without doubt engaged in a hand-to-hand combat. As the bald young man stopped the blow of the Ark Van Ders Modified with

the Blue Dragon Sword in hand that he swung downward, he retorted by swinging it like a blunt weapon. The appearance of the petite Saya setting up the huge firearm was a great gap by itself, but the appearance of her wielding it with one hand was a degree of shock that was beyond comparison.

Besides, she was not just noncommittally showing off, either. One could understand at first glance that she had learned systematic close combat techniques, such as how to parry the attack or to find a timing to strike back (counterattack).

Even Kirin was surprised when she had witnessed it for the first time.

First, to the height and proficiency of the technique.

And then, to the fact that that swordsmanship was similar to Ayato's — in other words, to the Amagiri Bright Dragon Style.

"Guh!"

While scattering intense sparks, the Blue Dragon katana and the Ark Van Ders Modified collided. It was clearly Saya, who was pushing.

However, Saya seemed to patiently and slowly wait for the time to come. Remaining expressionless as usual, she was indifferently drawing out attacks.

In the meantime, the mana dite of the Ark Van Ders Modified was gradually increasing its shine.

As he probably understood what was going on, impatience appeared on the bald young man's expression.

The young man's attacks became much more severe, and the slashing collided with the gun barrel.

Even so, neither Saya nor the Ark Van Ders Modified were shaken.

And the moment the shine of the mana dite reached its max—

Saya repelled the Blue Dragon katana at a speed uneven to that so far, and applied the muzzle right to the young man's abdomen.

".....<Burst>"

"\_\_"



Vibration and shockwave, similar to what happened in major earthquakes, gushed out, and the young man's body was instantly blown off to the edge of the stage. The scream was drowned out by a roaring sound, and the young man, who was slammed onto the defense barrier with a tremendous force, slipped down to the ground as it is. Smoldering and scorched-like smoke was rising from his body.

The destructive power of all the Lux that Saya handled was not average. If one were to receive it from a point-blank range situation, he would probably fall easy victim.

"End of the match! Winner, Sasamiya Saya & Toudou Kirin!"

While the mechanical voice that declared victory sounded, Saya, who turned her face towards Kirin, stuck out her right hand without smiling.

".....V"

The waiting room was also fully equipped with a shower room. The dome was used not only for this Phoenix, but also for the Gryps of team battles; the shower room was made quite wide so that it would be all right even if several people were to use it.

Saya and Kirin, who finished their match, were washing off their sweat there.

"Then, doesn't it mean that the gun is simply hard?"

While feeling comfort in the hot water that poured down, Kirin asked Saya a question that she had been thinking from a long time.

".....Right. In the Lobos transition system, the high output obtained is unstable, and if left as is, the gun barrel would not last (hold). So I converted a portion of the output as energy field in order to pin it down."

Saya, who was in the booth nearby, was washing her head while speaking.

"That's why the Lux was all right even though you fight to that extent, huh."

Be that as it may, the reckless usage of exchanging blows with small firearms was probably unexpected.

".....If I didn't do it like that, there was no way I could have kept up with Ayato."

Then, Saya said as if she read Kirin's mind.

According to Saya's story, when they were children, in order to keep up with Ayato's training, it seemed that the technique, which she devised and brought forth, was that.

"So it's not as if Saya-san is a disciple of the Amagiri Bright Dragon Style, right?"

"I just learnt by watching others.....But well, I was also taught a little by Ayato."

Kirin tried to imagine the figure of Saya and Ayato in childhood. Since both of them did not probably change that much, surprisingly she was able to smoothly imagine them. Though that sight (image) was her selfish imagination, she was somehow a little envious.

".....Still, they're late."

"That's right....."

Ayato and Julis had not yet come over.

"But thanks to it, we had time to wash off our sweat."

It was not really as if they had planned something after this, so they should leisurely wait.

"It's time to get out."

As Saya said so, she brushed the water away by shaking her head like a small animal.

"Oh hey, Saya-san. You should wipe yourself properly."

"....."

However, when she tried to pass the bath towel, Saya stopped and fixedly stared at Kirin.

No, Rather than.....Kirin, it would be right to say Kirin's chest.

"W-What is it.....?"

Going ahead of Kirin, who unintentionally retreated, Saya suddenly stretched out her hand.

"Kyaa!"

However, Kirin hid her chest at the last moment and defended against Saya's hands with one hand.

"Unh"

"W-W-What are you.....!"

Kirin was falling back little by little while being cautious, but Saya gradually shortened that distance, too.

No matter how wide it was, it was after all a shower room. Soon cornered to the wall, Kirin has lost her escape.

While making the finger wriggle from side to side, Saya's eyes shone mysteriously.

".....Since ancient times, it is said that the chest will grow bigger by rubbing it."

"That, it's clearly the wrong way to use it!"

Kirin desperately repelled Saya's hand, which was sent out at high speeds, with only that useless dialogue. At first glance, it looked like a sparring, but in close exchanges, Kirin was better.

In the end, unable to touch Kirin even once, Saya sulked.

".....It's unfair."

"E-Even if you said so....."

While still perplexed, Kirin firmly wound the bath towel around her body.



"M-More importantly, if you stayed wet like this for a long time, you will catch a cold."

And when she opened the door to get out of the shower room, a space window suddenly opened.

It was the intercom provided in the waiting room. Since the image was one-way traffic, only the voice reached the other side.

『Sorry, we're late! Are both of you there?』

What was projected on the space window was Ayato, who seemed to be out of breath. Next to him was of course Julis, who was also heavily breathing.

『Yeesh, those guards. I never expected them to be so persistent.....』

It appeared to be certain that something happened.

Though the entry permit was given to both of them, it was also disabled since they were taking a shower now.

"I-I am sorry, both of you. Excuse me, but please wait just a little more—"

After all, she only had a bath towel on her. As expected, she could not meet them with that appearance.

".....You finally came, huh."

However, as Saya interrupted Kirin's words and said so, she opened the space console and quickly cancelled the lock.

"Eh.....?"

Naturally, the door opened, and Ayato and Julis came inside.

"I'm really sorry, but because we were watching the match by broadcast....."



「え………?」

当然のようにはドアが開き、綾斗とユリスが中に入ってくる。  
二人は仲良く固まった。

「……やつと来たか」  
紗夜は空間コンソールを呼び出し、あっさりとロックを解除してしまった。



"Geez, you sure took your time....."

When the two people stepped into the waiting room, they stiffened together amiably.

Kirin also similarly stiffened at the entrance of the shower room.

However, only one person, Saya walked towards the two of them with a calm face and said with a slightly proud expression.

".....We won."

Afterwards, it went without saying that Saya seriously received a sermon from Julis.

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—Fifth day of Phoenix, Sirius Dome.

"Well then—"

As Julis stretched her body on the stage, Ayato turned his head and lightly laughed.

"Since I left everything up to you in the first round; this time, it's my turn."

"All right. Then, I will take it easy this time."

As Ayato replied to it with a wry smile, he lightly tapped Julis' back.

『Well then, finally the Phoenix has also entered the second round from today! In the second match, which would be held here in the Sirius Dome, we will first introduce the pair, which broke through the first round by displaying an overwhelming ability, the Seidokan pair Amagiri Ayato & Julis-Alexia Van Riessfeld!』

『Though the first round was clearly player Amagiri's monopoly, I wonder how the second round will turn out. I look forward to see it.』

While hearing the voices of the reporter and the commentator, which became something familiar in these several past days, Julis turned her gaze to the opponents.



It was a twin tail girl and the ponytail girl in the tag of the rank #37 and the rank #54 of Queen Veil Girl's Academy. As expected, both of them preeminently had a well-featured appearance.

If asked the question "which is the strongest academy in Asterisk?", the answer would vary from one person to another; but if asked the question "which is the weakest academy in Asterisk?", most people would answer Queen Veil. In fact, it was only once, even in the long history of Asterisk, that Queen Veil had won a championship.

However, the word 'weak' was not necessarily directly connected with the word 'unpopular'. When comparing the simple fans number, Queen Veil had continued maintaining a high rank since the foundation. Queen Veil, disregarding the general results of Festa, only considered the Festa as a stage for purely displaying its students' charm. It was that, which led to their popularity.

As the only girl's school among the six academies, it was the smallest academy. Establishing its own standards on the conditions of admission, it was the academy said to be the most difficult to enroll in. It was an academy of goddess (es), trying to find an ideal through beauty and strength.

Queen Veil Girl's Academy was such an academy.

"Really, what amazing cheers....."

While grumbling so, Julis activated Aspera Spina.

Today's hall was wrapped in deafening thunderous cheers, but the voices cheering the players of Queen Veil were clearly louder.

"Everyone, thank you!"

"We will do our best!"

The two girls of Queen Veil waved their hands with an amiable smile, and responded to them (cheers).

Though the twintail girl unfolded a twin swords type Lux and the ponytail girl, a spear type Lux, contrarily to their cute looks, there was no opening in their way of handling them (stance?).

Queen Veil might certainly be the weakest if seen from the Academy's perspective however, that was lying in the carefully selected principles that

their participation frame in the Festa was rarely filled, not because the belonging students were weak.

As a proof, the rank #1 of Queen Veil had left the good results of being the runner-up in the last Lindvolus.

"Ayato, you stay out of it."

"Understood."

Still, Julis calmly puffed her chest with confidence.

At the same time, the school badge on her chest announced the match start.

"Let's go!"

It was the twintail girl, who first attacked. Though she cut towards Julis, Julis easily blocked with the thin sword in her hand.

"—It's nothing compared to Ayato's or Kirin's sword"

"Eeih!"

Furthermore, though the ponytail girl joined there, Julis' Taijutsu completely repelled her attack.

In her recent past special training, Julis grew more than anything in fighting in close combat. Of course, she was not yet on the level of being able to cross swords with Ayato or Kirin, but still if against an average opponent, or even taking two people like this, she could handle them enough.

In the first place, although long-ranged attack was Julis' forte, her thin sword skill was also high. Perhaps it was because she had learned the basics from childhood.

"You!"

"Bloom proudly — Great Crimson Heart Blazing Shield!(Anthurium)"

The sharp thrust, which the ponytail girl released, was repelled by a shield of flame which manifested.

"Kyaa!"

"Waah, are you alright?"

The twintail girl supported the ponytail girl, who was blown away; at that chance, Julis greatly jumped back.

"Well, now it's my turn to attack."

Mana rustled around Julis.

"O flames of Trochia, over the ramparts, burn down the nine calamities—"

The flame, which blew up, wound a swirl, and nine fireballs in the form of a lovely primrose appeared around Julis.

"Bloom proudly — Dancing nine-spirering-flower(Primrose)!"

It which was dancing like a firefly attacked the tag of Queen Veil along with Julis' shouting.

"Nkya!"

As the ponytail girl could not fully dodge the three-dimensional attack from multiple directions, her school badge was shattered.

While the mechanical voice announced her partner's defeat, the twintail girl cut away the fireballs one by one while dodging them, and somehow managed to reduce the number.

"Humph! This much, even I.....!"

The moment when the girl cut off the last one and proudly stuck out her chest.

"Come out — Falling Crimson Flower of Molten Sky(Semiserrata)"

In response to Julis' words, a magic circle emerged at the girl's feet.

"Eh.....?"

Installation (setting) type ability — in other words, a trap.



「私の設置型能力では最高火力の技だ、存分に味わうがいい！」  
「くそっ！」

イレネが逃げ出そうと走り出すが、間に合うはずもない。

「綻<sup>ほころ</sup>べ

大<sup>ラ</sup>輪<sup>ヲ</sup>の爆<sup>レ</sup>耀<sup>シ</sup>華<sup>ア</sup>！





Julis had cleverly induced the girl up to there by using the fireballs.

On top of the head of the girl, who looked up in blank amazement, a huge flame Camellia<sup>[28]</sup> opened its bud.

"Eeeeeeeeh!?"

The girl hurriedly ran off to escape, but it was already too late.

The flame flower exploded at the same time it fell, and the girl's figure was easily swallowed by it.

"End of the match! Winner, Amagiri Ayato & Julis-Alexia Van Riessfeld!"

The mechanical voice announced the end.

When the blast and the swirl of flame soon settled, the girl, who lost consciousness, was lying on her back there.

『Th-This was once again a one-sided development! Moreover, a solo performance of player Riessfeld this time! Oh dear, this tag, we still can't see its bottom! After all, in this Phoenix, which is a tag battle, both of them haven't yet fought together.....I wonder about this.』

『No, in order to conceal their ability as a tag, it was an effective strategy in itself. There are also some cases in the past. More importantly, player Riessfeld is a tricky player. Anyway, since her ability is variegated, I think that being able to expediently cop with it is also her forte. Especially the last.....』

The commentator, seeming to have indeed seen well, minutely explained the process, in which Julis induced the girl until the place of the trap.

"Phew.....Well, something like this."

"Good work, Julis."

As Ayato met Julis with a smile, he raised his right hand.

Julis also seeing it revealed a smile, made a delightful sound and exchanged a high-five.

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"Geez, don't they know how to give up.....? They just repetitively ask foolish questions."

When finishing the winner interview, which dragged on as usual, and returning to the waiting room, Julis sighed and sank her body into the sofa.

"Hahaha.....well, it can't be helped since it's their job."

While laughing as troubled, Ayato prepared the tea.

"Oh, come to think of it, today's match, there is also one thing that was bothering me....."

"Hmmm?"

"Julis, did you happen to recite something like an incantation before?"

It was the time when she used the Dancing nine-spirering-flower in today's match.

"Ah, that, huh. That was, well, let's say it was a service from me. Such things seem rather to be popular with the gallery."

"E~eh."

He was a little surprised at this. It was because he was thinking that Julis was rather far distant from the mind for that kind of services.

"You don't need to be so surprised. Even I have considered my position. If I enter the stage, I will at least do that much service. Of course, when I can afford it that is."

Saying so, she shrugged her shoulders.

"The process necessary for the activation of the ability varies from person to person. Speaking in theory, there is no need for utterance and action, but there are also some people, with who it won't activate if they don't have a fixed procedure. Even I, who said thus, the incantation aside, it's rather easy for me to do an image for there is an utterance."

"I see....."

While drinking tea, Julis turned an implying gaze to Ayato.

"In the first place, even you shout the name of your techniques, right?"

"Oh.....That's, yeah, something like a habit. It's because in childhood, when I was training a lot with Saya, She said that it's cool like that."

"E~eh, it was for such a reason, huh."

Since he was prohibited the attendance with other pupils in childhood, it was only Saya and his older sister, who were getting on with Ayato's training. In addition, since he was not allowed in the dojo, he was mostly training in using Lux for self-defense with a minimum of power in the neighboring mountain.

When thinking about it now, it was a kind of extension of play; that was probably why his father was also turning a blind eye to it.

"Oh, by the way.....what would we do from now on today?"

Since Julis asked so with the teacup in one hand, Ayato folded his arms and began to think.

"Mmm, in reality I would like to go cheer for Saya and Kirin-chan, but.....as expected, we won't make it in time if we go now."

"Well, the match would be over by the time we arrive at the hall."

Today, they were not with Saya and Kirin. It was because both of them also had a match.

The first round was held over four days, but the second round would be held over two days. Since the third round would end in one day, unless they had a match in the same hall or the time of their matches were very much separated, it was difficult to go cheer.

"B-Besides, we haven't even had lunch yet, right?"

"Oh, now that you mention, it's true."

Certainly, they did not take lunch because of today's match time.

Although he did not particularly even mind until he said it, as soon as he noticed so, he suddenly felt hunger; well human is a mysterious thing.

"Then, let's first get it over with somewhere—"

"Ahem!"

As Ayato said so, Julis strangely coughed unnaturally.



".....Julis?"

"Uh.....actually, um.....well. I have prepared this for today....."

As Julis said so, she took out a large basket from the locker of the waiting room.

"Eh, don't tell me this is.....a bento?"

"Y-Yeah. Well, something like that."

While averting her gaze in embarrassment, Julis readily held out the basket.

Though he also spent time in training with Julis until the day off, such a thing was a first. Even in the academy, Julis was basically of those, who ate in the school cafeteria — though students, who were preparing their own lunch, were quite a minority though — he had never heard that she cooked.

And incidentally he had never thought up to there.

"Ah.....perhaps was it because Saya and Kirin had made a bento the other day?"

Since the unyielding spirit of Julis was staunch, there might have be some things to consider.

"It-It's not really because of that! This is.....right, it's just a whim!"

However, Julis's face turned bright red as she denied.

"Hahaha, is that so? Anyway, thank you. Then, let's eat without delay."

"It-It's something simple. Don't expect too much."

As he opened the basket while returning a wry smile to Julis, who reminded so, sandwiches of lovely size lined up there.

"E~eh, it's sandwiches, huh."

The ingredients were a standard line-up such as ham and lettuce, eggs and bacon. He picked up an egg sandwich from there and put it into his mouth.

".....H-How's it?"

On the face of Julis, who nervously asked so, anxiety was clearly visible.

"—Yeah, it's delicious."

It was his frank impression.

Since he did not usually eat that much sandwiches, there was nothing to compare, but the way that pepper moderately worked was of Ayato's taste.

"I-Is that so!"

Though a joyful expression suddenly spread on Julis' face, when she noticed Ayato's look, she soon turned her back.

"But, Julis can also cook, huh. I didn't know."

"W-Well, this much is nothing."

Even with her back turned, one could understand that she was proudly puffed up.

Such a part of her was really cute.

"And, won't you eat, Julis?"

The quantity of sandwiches settled in the basket was clearly too much for him to eat up alone.

It was probably made for two persons, but Julis did not quite touch it.

"No, of course I will eat, but....."



As Julis said so, she turned to Ayato for an instant with a look, which seemed to want to say something.

".....?"

Though he was pondering "what?", she said "this", he did not know what she was trying to say.

As she became irritated in the meantime, Julis stared at Ayato with a slightly sullen face.

".....It's not good to be unfair, you know?"

"Unfair?"

"Like I say, ah.....don't you think that it's unfair that you did it to Sasamiya and Kirin, but you don't do it to me.....no, it's not like I really want you to do it to me, but....."

Though Julis was mumblingly saying so in a low voice, he finally noticed then.

Was it perhaps about that?

"Err, perhaps.....um, Julis, too?"

"....."

Though Julis quickly turned away while blushing, she did not deny.

"T-Then, excuse me....."

As Ayato softly put his hand on Julis' head, he gently stroked it. The fragrance of flowers softly tickled his nose. Maybe because there were just the two of them, he was somehow embarrassed.

It was probably the same for Julis. Julis' face, which was already red, had dyed further red.

One wondered how long they would be (stay) like that.

Since both of them were silent, without grasping the sense of time, they did not know the timing to stop.

"O-Oh, yeah! How about we look at what happened to the matches of others while finishing lunch....."

But, after a while, Julis said so as to change the topic and turned on the TV.

"Ah, yes. There seem to be a lot of noteworthy matches today."

Although Ayato guessed it and withdrew his hand, he was somehow troubled.

He reluctantly picked up another sandwich. It was delicious after all.

"Woops.....!"

Then, Julis' finger, which was turning the channels suddenly stopped.

"—I see, those guys also have a match today, huh."

As he turned his look at Julis' voice, which was somewhere tinged with earnestness, a male student with a stature like a rock and dressed in the uniform of Seidokan was reflected in the space screen.

And standing off against him — was a schoolgirl of Le Wolfe with a huge scythe.

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".....Listen, Randy. Don't get impatient."

While setting up Bardiche Leo, Lester McPhail called out so to Randy Hook behind him.

"I know, Lester. First, gain time as much as possible. Right?"

"Yeah. As long as you properly divert, it's all right."

Time-buying was a strategy, which was not like him, but it could not be helped in this case.

After all, the opponent was the rank #3 of Le Wolfe. He did not want to admit it, but she was far above him.

"—Yo, did you say you're Lester?"

Then, the opponent — Irene Urzaiz called out to him in a strange and carefree way.

Even though the match start was already declared, with the huge scythe — the Bloody Scythe of Supreme Destruction(Gravi-Sheath) still on her shoulder, she did not take a stance.

".....Do you have any business with me?"

While carefully measuring the distance, Lester briefly answered.

From the recent events here — especially from his severe defeat — Lester had at least learned one thing: avoiding being reckless.

"You're <Murakumo>'s buddy, right? Since it's a good opportunity, tell me a little about him."

"Huh?"

To the unexpected question, Lester unintentionally knitted his brows.

"Not that I'm particularly interested, but since it's a rare chance."

".....I don't know why you asked something like that, but you misunderstood two points. First, he and I are just merely students of the same academy and we're not friends or whatever."

Lester, who said so with an amazed tone, reestablished Bardiche Leo and pointed it to Irene.

"And second. I came here to fight. Not to do worthless chattering!"

"Whew.....Is that so? Sorry for that."

As Irene shrugged her shoulders, after turning the Bloody Scythe of Supreme Destruction(Gravi-Sheath) round and round, she planted its butt end in the ground.

"Then, let's begin as you wish."

A ferocious smile floated on Irene's face, and the Bloody Scythe of Supreme Destruction(Gravi-Sheath) raised a groan like a beast.

"Randy! Run!"

Lester himself also started running while saying so. However, it was not as if he indiscriminately rammed. Taking distance from the right hand while going around greatly, he looked for a chance.

The Bloody Scythe of Supreme Destruction(Gravi-Sheath) used by Irene was a powerful Ogre Lux with the ability of gravity control.

But, it did not mean that there was no opening, which could be taken advantage of.

First and foremost, there was the fact that its ability was already widely well-known. Thanks to it, counter-measures could be taken to some degree.

It seemed like the ability of the Bloody Scythe of Supreme Destruction(Gravi-Sheath) did not designate the target itself; it was the type which demonstrated ability for a target coordinates. In other words, without staying at a same place, and if constantly keeping moving, one could end without receiving its effect.

And one could say that the greatest weakness of the Bloody Scythe of Supreme Destruction(Gravi-Sheath) was its fuel (mana) consumption and mischief. In Ogre Lux, there was something like side effect called compensation (price), and it seemed to be considerably brutal in the Bloody Scythe of Supreme Destruction(Gravi-Sheath). The reason being that while the Bloody Scythe of Supreme Destruction(Gravi-Sheath) went across many students' hand, those, who were able to effectively master it, were very few.

(In other words, the advantage will be ours if we drag the match on!)

Though it was Lester's usual strategy to do a preemptive swift attack (swift head-start), it could not be helped in this case. Since winning was above all important.

If there was a concern, it was the presence of Irene's partner — Priscilal, but she hung down to the wall of the stage without trying to move at all. She was looking towards Irene with a worried expression, but that was only it.

Although there was almost no data on Priscilal and when judging that she had also behaved like this in the first round, she did not seem to be an active battle member. There was the possibility that she was someone with some kind of ability.....for example, a Strega with an ability of long-ranged attack or defense system; but for the time being, it would be alright just to leave a constant attention to her.



"\*Sigh\*..... every last one of them fetching the same strategy..... don't you have something else?"

As Irene told as fed up, she wielded the Bloody Scythe of Supreme Destruction(Gravi-Sheath) with one hand.

The purple Ulm mana dite conspicuously shone strongly, and at the same time, that shine reached the ground of the stage.

"—To begin with, you don't have the ability to do what you're trying to do."

"Guh!?"

Randy, who was running the opposite of Lester across Irene, suddenly fell on the ground.

That figure was as if he was pressed by an invisible hand from above; he was painfully distorting his face. The gravity of the whole area was probably strengthened.

"Randy!"

"Serves you right. Now that you've flittered about, if you can't answer to the relatively wide scope of the challenge, this is the end."

As Irene once again wielded the Bloody Scythe of Supreme Destruction(Gravi-Sheath) while saying so, this time the purple shine converged around Randy, who fell down.

"Ughhh.....!"

Randy's face was distorted in pain. It seemed like the gravity was further strengthened by narrowing down the range.

"As if I'll let you!"

As Lester shortened the distance at a stretch at the opportunity, when Irene had her attention attracted to Randy, he swung down Bardiche Leo from behind her.

—But.

".....Like I said, it's just the usual."

Irene pivoted with the Bloody Scythe of Supreme Destruction(Gravi-Sheath) and danced in the air; she drove a sharp kick to Lester's nape at the same time she dodged the blow.

"Gah.....!"

She threw in once again a kick to the abdomen of Lester, who got down on his knees and blew away his large build.

"You're a deferment. So wait a little."

Irene, who said so and left, sedately went towards Randy.

"W-Wait.....!"

Ignoring the words that Lester squeezed out, Irene called out to Randy, who was lying on the ground.

"Do you give up?"

"W-Who is.....!"

Irene, who was looking down with cold eyes at Randy painfully squeezing out his voice, heaved a small sigh to that answer and casually swung the Bloody Scythe of Supreme Destruction(Gravi-Sheath).

"—!"

"Randy Hook, Loss of consciousness."

The arms of Randy, who was somehow trying to get up, feebly gave in, and his school badge declared his defeat.

"—One person first."

Saying so, Irene finally turned her look towards Lester, who stood up.

"E~eh, you're tough as expected, <Kornephoros>"

"You bastard.....don't underestimate me that much.....!"

Lester concentrated his prana in Bardiche Leo, which he held in his hand. The Prana that was poured reacted to the mana dite, and the output increased explosively.

It was Lester's meteor arts, <Blast Nemea>.

"Eat this!"

The blow of the battleax of light swelled more than double its normal size.

"Tch!"

Irene defended against it with the Bloody Scythe of Supreme Destruction(Gravi-Sheath), but of course it was not something that she could receive. It was just blown away to the rear.

"How's that!"

He was proud that the offensive ability of <Blast Nemea> was something unparalleled even in Seidokan. Even if it was not a direct hit, she should have been given damage as such.

"Hahaha.....as expected of the rank #9, I slightly underestimated you."

However the abruptly recovered Irene only slightly frowned.

(Did she jump back and reduce the shock.....!?)

Whether it be the kick earlier or the defensive now, Irene's taijutsu was not an ordinary level.

"I see.....you're an ordinary person, who just relies on her weapon, huh."

As Lester motivated himself, he once again re-adjusted the distance.

It was painful that Randy was defeated, but it turned out well as a strategy. If he let her use the ability like that, her limit should come before long. Until then—

"Tch, I didn't want to reveal the scope on my power in this pre-war, but.....it can't be helped. In consideration to your ability, I'll show you a little bit of seriousness."

"What.....?"

Lester frowned to Irene's words.

The ability of the Bloody Scythe of Supreme Destruction(Gravi-Sheath) was generally known. Like a while ago, it was used to increase gravity, crush and manipulate the direction of gravity. It could be put in practical use in various ways, but it was not heard that there was something more than that.

(Is it a bluff.....?)

As Irene approached Priscilal with disregard to the dubious Lester, she gently embraced her.

"Onee-chan....."

"My bad, Priscilal. I'll take a bit."

As Irene said so, she widely opened her mouth. Two canines sharply grew, shining eerily, Irene gently pierced into Priscilal's neck with them.

"Ahn.....!?"

In front of a stunned Lester, the Bloody Scythe of Supreme Destruction(Gravi-Sheath) in Irene's hand brightly shone. It looked as if it was trembling in delight.

"Phew....."

As Irene released her mouth before long, and though the blood dripping dyed Priscilal's chest red, it immediately stopped. Although a small scar was left in her neck, it had been also visibly healed (closed).

".....The Bloody Scythe of Supreme Destruction(Gravi-Sheath), you know, requires blood as the price for its ability. However, the fuel consumption is extremely bad, if used normally, I'll be dried in a blink of an eye. Therefore the user's body is deteriorated in this manner until they are ingested completely from the outside. It's truly a scary Ogre Lux huh."

While giggling, Irene set that Bloody Scythe of Supreme Destruction(Gravi-Sheath).

"Well, that said, it seems that if one's compatibility rating is not very high it won't happen though."

"I see.....just like a literal vampire, huh."

Though Lester could not hide his surprise, still he could not afford to pull back. He brandished Bardiche Leo and concentrated his Prana.

His aim was a counter with his meteor arts.

"Well, then let's go.....!"

As Irene wielded the Bloody Scythe of Supreme Destruction(Gravi-Sheath), spherical objects, which were dark purple, appeared around it; the sizes would be an armful. It was three in total, and they were softly floating around Irene.

"—Go, <Triple Destroyer(Tres Fanega)>!"

The spherical object attacked Lester at a high speed.

But Lester, who tried to dodge at once, was amazed at the fact that his body didn't move as he wanted. His body was heavy as if a lead was attached to it.

"I slightly straightened gravity..... Oh, know that its effect range is this whole stage. You can't escape."

"Guh!"

Although he somehow dodged the first in a hairbreadth, he stopped the second and the third with Bardiche Leo, since he was unable to avoid them.

At the moment that the spherical object reduced in one go and swallowed Bardiche Leo and burst it open (spittle).

"Hahaha, if you want to stop my gravity spheres, it's futile unless you have at least an Ogre Lux."

"Damn it!"

It was out of the question while empty-handed.

Attempting to activate the spare Lux, he reached for the waist holder but at that moment, the gravity instantly increased.

"Guaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!"

Unbearably pressed down into the ground, his whole body creaked due to the extent of the high gravity that it felt like it would cave in.

"—Well, do you still want to continue? <Kornephoros>."

Before he knew it, the blade of the Bloody Scythe of Supreme Destruction(Gravi-Sheath) was suddenly applied on his neck.

Though it was already hard for Lester to even squeeze out words, while gritting his teeth, he only raised his eyes and glared at Irene.

He wanted to deal her at least one blow. It was about what he was thinking, but.....he shivered when he saw the eyes of Irene, who looked down at him.

This was because the cold light, which could not be regarded as that of a human, was dwelling there (in her eyes).

If he were to resist here, Irene would probably mow his neck without hesitation.

Of course, if she were to do something like that, there was no doubt that she would be immediately disqualified.

Nevertheless he certainly felt it there, that suggestive evil atmosphere.

".....Understood. It's my defeat."

Along with the heavy breathing, Lester muttered.

"End of the match! Winner Irene Urzaiz & Priscila Urzaiz!"

While listening to the sentence of mechanical voice, Lester thoroughly chewed his molars.

## Chapter 5 – The Sisters of Le Wolfe

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—Phoenix seventh day, Sirius Dome.

『End of the battle! Winner, Amagiri Ayato & Julis-Alexia Van Riessfeld!』

As Ayato and Julis simultaneously stored their weapons, big cheers wrapped up the stage.

『Well! As expected, those two are strong! The Amagiri/Riessfeld pair, which had advanced to the first and the second round with an overwhelming strength, splendidly succeeds in qualifying to the main battle from block C!』

『Well! It was also a landslide victory this time. I look forward to see what kind of fight they will show us in the main battle.』

The opponents of the third round were a tag of World Dragon, but Ayato and Julis respectively took one opponent and brought them down almost at the same time.

Although it indeed took more time than the first and the second round, it was still a complete victory.

"Phew...I guess, for now with this, it's the qualification."

"Yeah, it's going well so far. But, the real thing begins from here."

Since the fellow prominent players were distributed to each block so that they did not meet in the qualifier, actually it was not so difficult for such players to reach the main battle.

However, since naturally only such prominent players would fiercely compete from the fourth round — the main battle, it would immediately become a fierce contest.

"There seems to be no surprise this time, the members of each academy will probably advance as expected to the main battle. Afterward, it's the combination<sup>[29]</sup>."

While heading to the press conference room from the stage, Julis said with a serious face.

"Tomorrow will be the announcement. I hope that there won't be something like suddenly confronting Saya and Kirin."



From the fourth round, a new tournament table would be set, but unlike the qualifier, this would completely be drawing of lots.

Tomorrow, it would be a complete rest day with no match, just the drawing of combination would be performed by the representatives of each academy.

"It would be good if we as well as Sasamiya and Toudou don't confront the puppets of Allekant early. I first want to know the scope of their power, even if a little."

The tags Saya/Kirin and Ardi/Rimsi had already succeeded in advancing to the main battle.

"And if possible, I also don't want to confront the twins of World Dragon, and the true Knights duo of Garrardsworth. And moreover — the Violent Vampire Princess(Lamilexia), too."

Something earnest was mixed in Julis' voice.

Irene, who had defeated Lester and Randy, had not yet finished the third round, but it was almost certain that she would reach the main battle.

"I never expected that her ability was to that extent. Honestly in one-on-one, I don't feel like being able to win... How about you?"

"Mmm...if it's purely in close combat, I guess."

Originally, it was hard to call the scythe an excellent (superior) weapon. Since its attack pattern was extremely limited, it was easy to handle an opponent using it. But, Irene seemed to compensate it with her Taijutsu — rather, with her innate body spec, but in normal fighting of crossing swords, even technically looking, there was no doubt that Ayato would be advantageous.

Be that as it may, since the opponent also had an ogre lux, it was impossible to know if the Demon Sword of The Black Furnace(Ser-Versta)'s ability would be effective. If so, he should judge that it would be difficult to one-sidedly chop (cut down the opponent).

"As far as I can see from the data, the effect of the Bloody Scythe of Supreme Destruction(Gravi-Sheath)'s ability seemed to also extend to the user himself. In close combat, she can't be too drastic, but..."

In other words, it meant that in case that he also entered the high gravity area, they would be crushed together.

In fact, the Bloody Scythe of Supreme Destruction(Gravi-Sheath) itself seemed unaffected; so it seemed that he would not have any problem as long as he attacked without stepping in.

"—However, it's above all the existence of her little sister that is a threat. To think that she is a Regenerative."

While advancing in the passage, Julis grumbled so with a sigh.

A Regenerative was a kind of Strega or Dante, who, as the name suggested, was able to restore his wounds. It was not to the extent of psychic healer, who could heal others' wounds, but it was considered extremely rare class ability.

"Though the abilities of Regeneratives range in all scopes, hers is quite something. Let alone wound restoration, if she is able to even regenerate blood lost, then she is the highest class. She is probably even able to regenerate loss parts of a body. It's an unexpected hidden card."

Though the national registration was obligated to those with ability and the information was disclosed/shared all over the world, this did not apply to countries where government functions were not perfectly working in various circumstances. Irene's and Priscila's hometown region was exactly that kind of country.

"To think that they cover for the badness of mana consumption of the Bloody Scythe of Supreme Destruction(Gravi-Sheath) in this way...really, I don't know if I should be amazed or in admiration."

Anyway, one could say that the Bloody Scythe of Supreme Destruction(Gravi-Sheath)'s greatest weakness could be covered with this.

"Oh well. Anyway, it's after the combination will be announced tomorrow — Oh, speaking of tomorrow, do you have any plans?"

"Since it's a rare occasion, I intend to go see the drawing, but..."

"Hou, it's a curious case."

Since tomorrow was a rest day, there was also no training schedule.

He was invited there by Claudia, who participated in the drawing.

"What about you, Julis?"

"Yeah, recently my hometown is annoying in various ways. I intend to settle all kinds of formalities and communications."

Though Julis said so with a tedious face, she suddenly stopped.

And turning to Ayato, who hung and stopped, she asked as to confirm.

"I will tell just in case, but...please, don't get involved in any trouble, okay?"

---

The combination drawing was held in Sirius Dome, with which Ayato completely became familiar.

"How do you do, Ayato? Welcome."

Near the stage, but a booth seat, which was separated from the general audience seating.

When he entered there by following the passage, which was told to him, Claudia welcomed him with a smile.

"There was such a seat, huh. I didn't know."

Though by no means wide for a space, it was quite comfortable since there were few seats.

Above all, since there was only Claudia, it was almost a chartered status.

"Because this is a booth dedicated for the student council president of Seidokan. Please, this way."

When sitting on a seat as recommended, Claudia, who was sitting nearby, bowed her head.

"First of all, congratulations for the qualification to the main battle."

"Ah, yes. Thank you."

Ayato hurriedly returned a bow, too.

"I also expect your success in the main battle. Good luck."

"I will do my best as much as possible...well, it will be difficult since there are only amazing people."

"Fufufu, since all the people, who reached the main battle, are only players with reliable ability. But as far as I can see, I think there are not many tags, which can fight evenly with you. That's why this drawing is so important and a heavy responsibility."

"Oh, which reminds me, is it all right for me to stay here?"

In the drawing, Claudia was supposed to draw lots. He wondered if himself, the one concerned could be leisurely chatting here.

"We will draw last. Until then, there are just boring things like greetings from big shots and the summary of the first half of the competition"

Certainly in the stage, a person, who seemed to be a member of the Steering Committee, was making some kind of fervent speech in front of a huge space screen. Apparently, he seemed to explain the comparison between this tournament's trend and the previous tournament's; but honestly, the contents was not that much interesting to hear.

Nevertheless, the audience stands seemed to be full like during a match.

In fact, most of the spectators probably came to see the drawing, so it seemed that nobody was listening so intently.

"Still...it's been a long time since I have been alone like this with Ayato."

"Eh...?"

To Claudia, who suddenly drew her body nearer, he unintentionally stiffened.

"Lately, I was just continuously buried in work, and Ayato was monopolized by Julis and the others...I was lonely, you know?"

As Claudia took Ayato's arm, she further glued her body to his.

"No, that's...um..."

Since he was strongly pressed against her rich and soft bosom, Ayato was on tenterhooks.

At the same time, an indescribable sweet fragrance tickled his nose.

"—Oh, Sorry Claudia!"

Then, in a good timing, a call came to his portable terminal.

As he separated his body from hers taking advantage of this and opened a space window, there was projected the face of Kirin, who knitted her brows as troubled.

『U-Um, Ayato-senpai, sorry for suddenly calling you...!』

"What's the matter?"

Kirin was clearly panicking. It seemed that some unexpected situation occurred.

As he was wondering what it was and leaned forward, Kirin in a flustered state continued speaking.

『Errr, actually today, I have come to the commercial area with Saya-san, but...b-before I knew it, I lost sight of her...』

"Oh...I see."

With only that, she had already fully transmitted the message, but she urged just in case.

『A-And then, when I contact her on her portable terminal, she said that she got lost...! I-I don't know what to do...』

"All right. Then, I will also help looking for her, so let's meet first. Where are you right now?"

『T-Thank you! Now I am—』

And then, deciding the location of the meeting with Kirin, he cut the communication.

Since at least Kirin was in a place not so far from where he was, he would probably immediately meet with her.

However, the problem was more Saya. After all, Saya's no sense of direction was anything less than astounding. In elementary school days, when he tried to contact her because she never came back after saying she went to buy juice, there was a time when she had even been lost in the neighboring town across a mountain. Though she would not have

indeed gone out from Asterisk, it would be no wonder even if she lost her way wherever in this city.

"Sorry, Claudia. It's just as you heard, so..."

As Ayato looked back while saying so, he was startled.

"..."

Claudia, pouting with a sulky look, was glaring at him.

"E~errr, Claudia...?"

Since it was his first time seeing Claudia like this, Ayato could not help being perplexed.

Claudia, usually with smile, calm and compose—

"...Even though it was a rare chance to be together after a long time."

Her blaming tone was somewhere childish, too.

No, rather one should say that it was suitable for her age.

"I was really looking forward to it, you know?"

"Ah, uh, that's....."

As the voice of Ayato, who did not know what to say, became hoarse, Claudia suddenly her face turned away.

"I-I'm really sorry! I will be sure to make up for this, so!"

Ayato hurriedly apologized, but even so Claudia, while still facing the other way, said nothing.

When Ayato, who was earnestly troubled, was almost at wits' end wondering what he could do, he suddenly noticed that the shoulders of Claudia, who still was facing the other way, were slightly shaking.

"Ah..."

"—Fufufu, I am sorry. I overdid a little."

With that timing, Claudia, who turned around, stuck out her tongue.

"...Really, give me a break, Claudia."

To Ayato, who unintentionally sank down, Claudia revealed her usual smile.

"It's true that I was looking forward to it, but I will forgive you this much."

"Ugh..."

"That said, we can't leave Sasamiya-san, who is lost."

Claudia gently said so, and opened the door.

"I will wait for you to make up for it."

"...All right."

As Ayato replied to it with a wry smile, he left the booth and hurried to the subway station.





---

"Well then. I think it's probably around here."

Ayato said so, looking around the street.

Position-like, they were in the western part of Asterisk, the commercial area outskirts. He contacted Saya's portable terminal, and from the information they received from her, they narrowed down from there to this neighborhood—

"We no longer have choice, but to search on foot."

"Indeed..."

Even Kirin, who joined, was restlessly turning her eyes around.

Since they told Saya not to move from where she was as much as possible, the situation should at least not grow worse than this.

"For the time being, let's split and search. We have to find her before it gets dark."

"Ah, then I will look this way."

"Yeah, I leave it to you, Kirin-chan."

"Yes."

As Kirin politely bowed, she disappeared to the other side of the street in trot.

Although during the period of the Festa, since this area was also close to the redevelopment area, there were not that many tourists' figures. By just that much, the figures of ill-bred lots were slightly outstanding, but one of the reasons was probably because Le Wolfe was close.

When thinking so, he did not think that it was rash to make Kirin have a different course of action, but he judged that there were not that much people with Kirin's level of skill, and as an ex-rank #1, Kirin's face and ability were well-known. So there was probably nobody, who would dare pick a fight with her.

Rather, the problem was more of Saya's side; when thinking that even some kind of fate was attached, he could not help worrying.

—Of course, about her opponent.

Since Saya was basically someone, who did not know how to hold back, when thinking about it, it might have been after all the correct choice to split in order to find her as soon as possible.

"Judging from the scenery reflected in the space window, it did not seem to be the main street. So it means that I have no choice but to search in the alleys one by one, huh..."

After sighing once, Ayato entered the nearby alley for the time being.

The alley, which had somewhat a slightly depressed feeling, was gloomy, and there were not that many people

Ayato returned on his heel because even though he has advanced to a certain extent, it was off without change.

" —"

Ahead of the alley, he felt like he heard something like people's voices from the parts that were in shadow.

He stopped and strained his ears.

"Please...Stop...! Let me go...!"

He certainly heard this time. And moreover, it seemed that it was not that much calm.

As he erased his presence and quietly observed the situation, one girl was surrounded by several men in the shade of a building.

(That is...)

Moreover, to his surprise, Ayato recognized both parties.

The girl was Priscila Urzaiz. The men were the guys who had fought against Irene on the street the other day.

If so, then it was probably such a situation.

"Hey, don't shout like that. I hate when it's annoying"

"That's right. Well, if you want to blame someone, blame your sister."

"Mm! Mmmm!"

One man was holding Priscilal's mouth with his hand. The men were five in total.

As far as he watched the previous scuffle (with Irene), there were opponents that even the current him could handle on one-on-one. Settling it with power like before was out of the question. And moreover, after having been warned repeatedly not to poke his nose into others' affairs and if he was to do it as far as a scuffle, he would not be able to face Julis. And if he were to be even disqualified in the Phoenix as a result, it would be irreparable.

On the other hand, he could not also pretend not to have seen.

(Oh well...It can't be helped.)

Ayato raised his voice on purpose and showed up from the shade.

"W-What is it, bastard?"

One of the men noticed Ayato and activated a dagger type lux. His reaction was unexpectedly good.

"No, well, I just happened to pass by, but...could you let that child go?"

"Haah!?"

To Ayato's words, the men fell into a blank stare.

It suddenly became an atmosphere in which there was no more use in arguing.

"To suddenly come interrupting and say something funny, bro..."

While the men were glaring at Ayato, they activated their lux one after another.

But, one person among them suddenly pointed at Ayato and shouted.

"Aaah! T-This guy is the <Murakumo>!"

"<Murakumo>...do you mean the rank #1 of Seidokan!?"

"This stupid bastard? Seriously?"

For a moment, confusion spread among the men.

Ayato did not miss that chance.

As he slipped through the men taking them by surprise, he took the hand of Priscilal who was pressed against the wall, and started running at full power inside the alley.

"Ah! T-This guy...!"

The men, who were holding Priscilal, extended their hands, but it was slightly out of reach.

"U-Um...!"

"Anyway, run for now!"

From behind the men were chasing after them while raising angry voices. They would talk after succeeding in escape.

It appeared optimal to escape in the zigzagged alley, but it was actually the opposite.

In contrast to Ayato, who was not familiar with the terrain, the men seemed to know the alleys around here.

"Turn right! The other way drives into a dead end!"

"Contact the leader! Some of you turn this way!"

The angry voices of the men echoed from here and there.

It seemed like Ayato was gradually led towards the redevelopment area.

"This is a little bad, I guess..."

If he were to undo his seal, the effect might appear until after the next day. Since Ayato's match was the day after tomorrow, there was still time, but he wanted to avoid such a situation as much as possible.

—But, when necessary, it would be unavoidable.

As he was thinking about such a thing while running, Priscilal suddenly pulled Ayato's clothes.

Remaining silent, she pointed her fingertip upwards.

"Above...? Ah, I see!"

Ayato, who understood Priscilal's intention, released his power just for a moment in a place around the corner of the alley. Though a sharp pain ran

through his body, without minding it he held Priscilal in his arms, kicked the wall and ran up until the rooftop of the building at a stretch.

The buildings were not very high in this area. This building was a four-storey building.

"Hey! Where did they go!?"

"Look for them! They should still be in the neighborhood!"

They could hear such voices of the men from the alley below

As they remained quiet as is, the men noisily returned on the way where they came over before long.

"Whew..."

Though it was not necessarily true that those guys would not eventually notice here, it was probably better not to move for a while. Fortunately, this rooftop also had many shades such as those of water supply tanks, it was ideal to hide oneself.

"U-Um..."

"Ah...S-Sorry!"

To Priscilal, who opened her mouth in a situation, in which it was somewhat difficult to speak, Ayato realized that he was still holding her in his arms. He hurriedly put her down while apologizing.

"No, please do not! Thank you very much for having saved me in that dangerous situation!"

When Priscilal deeply bowed, she took out her portable terminal.

"Errr, so...may I contact my big sister?"

"Ah, yes. Of course."

Priscilal slightly nodded, and began to operate her portable terminal. Probably so as not attract attention, she had changed the settings of the space window and the sound.

In the meantime, Ayato was spying on a sign below. When he strained his ears, he was still hearing noisy voices from far away, but the neighborhood was quiet.

Or rather, only the whole neighborhood was unnaturally quiet.

(What is it.....?)

Naturally, it was much better than being thronged in force, but this was suspicious in any way. It was better to be cautious.

"Um, Amagiri-san...?"

"Ah, sorry. Did you get to contact your sister?"

As he returned a smile to Priscilal, who timidly called out to him, she nodded as relieved.

"Yes. She said that she will come to pick me up soon."

"I see. That's a relief."

In reality, it would be right to report to the garrison, but naturally even Priscilal should know. That if she only contacted her big sister, Ayato did not intend to further butt in, too.

"So...why on earth did such a thing happen?"

Although he somehow understood the circumstances, since he did not know all the details, he asked.

"I think that...those people are men of the casinos in the entertainment district."

"Entertainment district?"

"Oh...it's the common name of the place that gathered illegal shops in a part of the redevelopment area."

"E~eh..."

So, there was such a place in the redevelopment area, huh.

Since if it was just the casinos, there were a great number of stores, which could be legally enjoyed in the central district, there was probably a good reason to call the stores of that place illegal.

"So, what did the guys of those casinos want from you?"

"A-Actually...it seems that my big sister went on a rampage there a little while ago...it was like a nearly catastrophic situation..."



Though Priscilal was explaining the cause with her eyes cast downward; he was hardly able to hear the latter half that was explained in a voice, which seemed to vanish.

But still since he understood the general situation, there was no problem.

In other words, they tried to get revenge on Irene, who destroyed the casinos, but since they were completely helpless, they changed their target to her little sister Priscilal. It was generally something like that.

"U-Um, but please do not misunderstand! Onee-chan — m-my sister is certainly violent and quick-tempered, but she is actually a very very gentle person!"

Priscilal fervently spoke so while waving her arms buzzingly.

When seeing from her figure that she dearly loved her big sister, Ayato somewhat became heartwarming.

"Hahaha, I see. —Oh, excuse me for the late introduction; I am Amagiri Ayato. You already know though."

"I am Priscilal Urzaiz....my sister was rude to you the other day."

Grabbing the hand that Ayato held out, Priscilal smiled wryly.

To begin with, each of them was a major contender among the participants of the Phoenix. There was no way that they did not know.

"The truth is that I must be able to do something about that much by myself, but...I am not strong like my big sister."

Priscilal said with a somewhat sad face.

Although Priscilal was indeed a Starpulse Generation, it looked like she did not have that much battle experience.

Rather, as he was actually in contact with her like this, in the first place she did not seem to be of a character for such things.

"Then, why did you enter the Phoenix?"

"That's..."

Priscilal was confused, and when she was about to open her mouth—

"Hey, what are you doing there...?"

Along with a sharp voice, an intense blood lust was struck to Ayato from behind.

He reflexively turned around and raised his guard.

Irene, who set up the Bloody Scythe of Supreme Destruction(Gravi-Sheath), was standing there after having appeared in the air.

"Onee-chan!"

"...Don't tell me you laid your hands on Priscilal?"

A clear hostility and strong wariness were blurred in her eyes.

"N-No! I told you earlier, right? That Amagiri-san helped me!"

"Shut up, Priscilal. In the first place, why did Amagiri Ayato help you? It's what I don't understand. This guy has no obligation to help you. Rather, since you're an enemy, it would be normal to leave her, right?"

Priscilal, in a state of panic, explained to Irene, but Irene seemed to turn a deaf ear to it.

She was glaring with her pupils deep dark like the dusk.

"Enemy...? It might be so if on the stage, but isn't it different now?"

"Tsk! What splendid words! But I won't be fooled...!"

As Irene spat so out, she got down to the roof, and wielded the Bloody Scythe of Supreme Destruction(Gravi-Sheath).

"I don't know what you're scheming, but I will make you regret for having laid your hands on Priscilal."

"...What a bummer!"

It seemed like Irene was serious.

Feeling a ferocious intimidating air, which gradually stung his skin, Ayato's hand naturally extended to the holder on his waist.

Ayato was already within the range of the Bloody Scythe of Supreme Destruction(Gravi-Sheath)'s ability. On this rooftop, where the place he could move, was limited, he didn't think that he could escape.

—However.

"Onee-chan...Don't tell me you're seriously saying that...?"

When Priscilal broke between Irene and Ayato, she scowled at Irene with quiet eyes. Though small, her voice let one feel her firm strong will and intense anger.

At that moment, light returned in the eyes of the startled Irene, and she hurriedly put the Bloody Scythe of Supreme Destruction(Gravi-Sheath) on a stand-by state.

"I-I understand! I'm kidding! I'm kidding, so don't get that angry!"

Irene pushed out both her hands forward while floating cold sweat and slowly shook her head.

"Really? Won't you be violent towards Amagiri-san?"

"I-I won't, I won't!"

"Absolutely? Can you promise?"

"I-I can! I promise!"

"Yeah, then it's all right."

Priscilal sweetly smiled and contentedly nodded.

On the other hand, Irene helplessly dropped her shoulders, but she immediately raised her face and turned her gaze to Ayato.

"However — there are two things I want to ask you."

"...Onee-chan?"

"It's just to ask, just to ask! I won't do anything! It's all right like that, right?"

"Hmm..."

To Priscilal, who looked at Irene with suspicious eyes, Ayato smiled wryly and said.

"I don't really mind. So, what do you want to ask?"

"First. Was it you, who took care of the guys below?"

"...? What are you talking about?"

Since he did not understand the meaning of the question, he frankly asked a question in return.

Irene straightforwardly stared at the eyes of such Ayato for a while, but she sighed before long and continued.

"It's okay, I understand. Then it's the second, but...according to Priscila, you happened to pass by this neighborhood accidentally. What business did you have to expressly pass by such a back alley?"

"That's—"

While speaking, Ayato remembered his original purpose.

"Ah, that's right!"



As Ayato hurriedly took out his portable terminal, he called Saya. A while after the call, a space window opened and Saya's face was projected.

"Saya, are you all right? Where are you right now?"

『I'm all right. The problem was settled just some time ago.』

『Ah, Ayato-senpai. Thanks God, I just joined with Saya-san now.』

Kirin, who suddenly came in frame next to Saya, smiled with a relieved face.

"I see, then it's good."

He heaved a hot breath of relief.

It seemed like Kirin found her before she caused any problem.

『Where are you right now, too, Ayato?』

"Oh, I think that it's probably not that far from where you're, but...then, Kirin-chan, let's join at the corner of a little while ago. Okay, see you."

As Ayato finished the communication and kept his portable terminal, Irene and Priscilal were watching with a face showing that they had nothing to say.

"It's just as you heard, so...I was looking for a friend who was lost."

"—So he says, Onee-chan."

Priscilal slightly stuck out her chest proudly.

Though Irene was scratching her head with an embarrassing face, she greatly sighed, dropped her shoulders and curtly said.

"Tsk, I understand. I owe you one."

"It's all right. You would have done the same if I were in trouble."

Ayato's words came from his true intentions, but Irene shook her head as if it was bothersome.

"I can't leave it as is...If I don't quickly settle the debt, it'll be difficult later."

To the stupefied Ayato and Priscilal, Irene took out her portable terminal after heaving a sigh again, and displayed a space window.

What was projected was the tournament table.

"Ah, you didn't know, huh. The combination of the main battle has already been announced."

Ayato reflexively searched his name; and when he saw his opponent, he opened his mouth gapingly.

Phoenix fourth round.

In the opponent column of Ayato and Julis, there were the names of Irene and Priscilla Urzaiz along with the school badge of Le Wolfe Black Institute.



## Chapter 6 – Power and Price

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"I-I-I-It's terrible, president!"

As Kashimaru Corona jumped in the student council president room with a pale face, she tangled her feet and fell down from her face.

The student council president room of Le Wolfe was located in the deepest part of the central school building; if there was no window, there was almost no kind of ornaments, either. But not only was it not shabby in the least, but also all the minimum furniture required was solid, and there were just things, which let one feel height and dignity of style.

".....What's the matter?"

Dirk, who was sitting in a chair too big compared to his build, asked in a very poor tone without even glancing at such a Corona while putting in order the electronic documents at hand.

"T-That's, Urzaiz-san suddenly says that she wants to speak to you....."

In a place where Corona said so while holding the tip of her nose, the door of the student council president room was blown away with a thunderous roar.

"Hyaa!?"

"—Yo Dirk, I intrude."

As Corona timidly turned around, Irene, who carried the the Bloody Scythe of Supreme Destruction (Gravi-Sheath) in her hand, was standing there with a fearless smile.

In addition, when looking behind her, the figures of the guards, who protected this room, were lying on the floor in a heap.

"Awawawawa.....!"

As Corona finally reached where Dirk was while crawling on all fours, she hid on his back.

"Irene, it may not look like this, but I'm very busy, you know?"

Although Dirk rested his hands, which were processing the documents, still he was not unfazed at all.

"Is that so? Well then, let's quickly settle that."

As Irene said so, she casually swung Gravi-Sheath downward.

"Kyaa!?"

The office desk in front of Dirk was cut in two, and Corona jumped up and screamed.

However — as expected Dirk did not even bat an eyelid.

".....What do you think you're doing?"

"Oh, that's my line. I had thought that you were a man, who always keeps his promises."

"Of course, I always keep my promises. If I wasn't, I would have been long ago buried in a grave."

"Which mouth brawl that!"

To those words, a violent bloodlust was released from Irene's body, and Gravi-Sheath raised a growl.

But, the next moment, Irene greatly jumped back; she lowered her body and turned a cautious look on her surroundings.

"Tsk, so you also let a "cat" lie hidden here, huh!"

"Unlike you, I'm a frail ordinary person, you know? This much precaution is natural."

"Cat" is the codename of the students attached to the "Black Cat Organization", who carried secret tasks under the direct control of the student council. That said, even Corona had never met its members, and did not even know really what kind of organization it was. She had at least heard that it was divided into "silver eyes", which barely acted within the school, and "golden eyes" consisting mainly of intelligence/work activities off-campus.

As Corona, who was petrified with terror just before, restlessly looked around inside the room, there was no other person's figure other than Dirk and Irene to be found. In the first place, there was no place in this room where someone could hide.

Even so, as Irene had certainly felt someone's presence, she did not move while cautiously raising her guard.

"So, let's hear what made you spit out such a false accusation."

".....Today, Priscilal was attacked. I won't let you say that you didn't know."

"Oh, that matter, huh."

"Has such a thing happened?" Dirk said in a light tone.

"Don't tell me you're suspicious of me. In the first place, there were people of the entertainment district, right? Originally, it was the seeds that you sowed."

"I'm aware of that. But — in the contract terms I've made with you, there should have been Priscilal's protection included. Don't tell you've forgotten!"

"Of course, I remember. I've already notified not to lay a finger on you sisters, and also told to properly punish the guys, who attacked you the other day. However, there are still many people in Le Wolfe, who don't listen to what I say. You are also aware of that, right?"

"Then, why leave such run over guys be? You should quickly take care of them."

As Irene calmed down a little, she thuddingly sat down onto the sofa while glaring at Dirk.

"Even such guys can be useful in their own way."

"Useful.....? Hmph, well it's okay. But you know Dirk. Wasn't a "cat" attached to Priscilal's protection when I'm not by her side? What was that fellow doing this time?"

"A "cat" was attached to her. Well, it looks like he was a little late this time."

Dirk snorted as bored.

"A little late.....you say?"

A dangerous light shone once again in Irene's eyes.

"She's a Regenerative anyway. She will still be okay if she suffered only slight scratches, right?"

"....."

As Irene slowly stood up while looking downward, she casually set up Gravi-Sheath.

The purple scythe rumbled in her hand with a clattering sound.

For Corona, it looked as if it was laughing.

"—Go to hell!"

A cold voice with no emotions.

However, contrary to it, the slashing, which was exercised, was of a speed as to tear the wind.

The tip of Gravi-Sheath was aiming at Dirk's throat with a high accuracy, but it changed its trajectory in the brink as if it was blocked by an invisible wall.

Even so, the blade, which slightly grazed, made a red line on Dirk's cheek.

Irene stepped back as to re-adjust the distance, and re-set Gravi-Sheath while still looking downward.

"Hmm, to think that the corrosion would go on until here....."

Dirk frowned unpleasantly — it was like usual though — and curtly stretched his voice.

"Hey, Irene. Who will be in trouble if I were to die?"

".....Tch."

To those words, Irene raised her face as she was surprised.

The purple phosphorescence released by Gravi-Sheath quietly weakened.

"Also about this matter, even though late, he made it in time on the site. The "cat" could not just come out because that boy of Seidokan unnecessarily meddled in. He could not afford to be seen by those guys. You also know that, right?"

".....But, it's a fact that she was saved by that guy."

"I understand I understand. Then, what the hell do you want?"

As Dirk casually said so, he chimed the back of his chair.

"At this rate, it'll inevitably be difficult to fight. I will proceed logically from here, don't you dare interfere."

".....Do what you want."

With a fed up face, Dirk waved his hand as if driving away a stray dog.

"Yeah — Sorry for the disturbance."

Irene briefly said so and staggeringly left the room.

Soon after the atmosphere of the room loosened, Corona greatly heaved a sigh.

"Haa.....It-It was really scary."

However, a moment after she felt relieved, Dirk's sharp voice immediately flew.

"Hey, Corona. What time is it now?"

"Y-Y-Yes! Errr, it is past 6:00 p.m.!"

As Corona hurriedly stood up, she immediately checked the time and answered so.

"It's a good time.....all right, foretell."

"Eh? R-Right now?"

Corona surprised looked back at Dirk.

"Isn't it better to do it after cleaning up the room for the time being....."

Thanks to Irene's rampage, the student council president room was messy. The office desk was cut in two, the carpet was tattered and the sofa was upside down. Though not very much, it was not a relaxing environment.

However.

".....Don't make me repeat myself."

"Y-Yes, I am sorry! I will prepare immediately!"

To Dirk's voice, which was full of anger, Corona took out tarot cards from the pocket within her uniform and lined them on the floor.

".....So, what shall I foretell?"

As she timidly asked, Dirk folded his arms and curtly answered while looking down at Corona.

"It's as usual. Do it freely"

"Yea....."

Though perplexed, Corona sorted the tarot cards according to a procedure.

The fortune-telling was one of the many hobbies of Corona. It was something she was properly taught of, but most of her knowledge about it was self-study. In a level of being crazy about it, and yet unskilled at it, it did not much — rather, it hardly proved right. Even so, Dirk would, like this, order Corona to foretell almost on a daily basis.

It was fine in its own right, but what troubled her was that Dirk did not say "what do you want to foretell?". Since the fortune-telling was generally something that was requested, she was troubled about this every time.

"Ah, then, since it is a rare occasion, I will foretell the chance of success of Urzaiz-san and her sister in the Phoenix!"

Corona clapped her hand to the good idea.

Though at last after being usually so much troubled, she foretold something she herself thought to be useless, such as the side dish for tonight's dinner or tomorrow's weather, she found just the right material for fortune-telling today.

"Then, I will begin....."

As Corona closed her eyes, she began to sort the cards by touch.

Then, a pale magic circle emerged around Corona, and a huge amount of mana began to flow.

But, Corona herself unaware of it, chose a card with her eyes still closed, and turned it over.

"—All right."

At the same time that Corona finished turning over the five cards, which she chose, the magic circle disappeared.

"Err, the Sun reverse position to the Fool normal position, and then....."

Opening her eyes, Corona, who read the cards that were turned, enthusiastically let her face soon brighten and looked up at Dirk.

"I did it, president! It came out that Urzaiz-san and her sister will win!"

"Yea, I guess."

As Dirk muttered it as if natural, he slightly waved his hands.

"Corona, go call one vice-president, it doesn't matter who it's. After that, you may already go back."

"Y-Yes, I understand."

As Corona quickly put in order the cards, she left the student council president room after bowing.

Though the student council of Le Wolfe had taken a good shape verging on the dictatorship by the student council president Dirk, it was composed of vice presidents from the first to the third years, and many secretaries. They were an existence, which supported Dirk's work and, in the proper sense of the term, more close to being secretary than Corona, who was only managing miscellaneous affairs.

"Still, the president really likes the fortune-telling."

While Corona murmured such a thing, she headed towards the student council room, which packed the executive<sup>[30]</sup>.

On the other hand, Dirk, who was left in the student council president room, was lost in thought still with folded arms.

Since Corona's fortune-telling came out like that, it was an unavoidable event. He must adopt some measures.

"—It can't be helped, I shall make preparations."

As Dirk muttered so, he took out a black portable terminal from the broken Office desk.



It was Dirk's portable terminal and at the same time not. It was an exclusive portable terminal that was allowed to be used by only the student council president Le Wolfe Black Institute.

Dirk operated it with experienced hands. It put only voice communication without opening a space window.

"Connect me to the Seventh "gold eye"."

As he briefly told so, after a little while, a small gloomy voice responded to it.

---

".....Invite you to dinner, you say? Don't tell me you accepted it?"

"Yeah, well."

After staring at Ayato's face for a while with a stunned look, Julis feebly sat down on the corridor of the training room and buried her head in her arms.

"Y-You're really....."

As she was at a loss for words, she kept silent as is.

Since Ayato expected her reaction, he didn't dare to make excuses.

Then Julis remained crouched down for a while, but as soon as she stood up, she slowly shook her head from side to side.

"—No, I understand. Since I associated with you, I have to get used to these things. All right, just exactly what I want."

And then she laughed with a somewhat cramped face.

"Okay, for now tell me once again from the beginning what has happened."

"Oh, like I said err, yesterday, I found Priscilal-san, who was attacked.....after saving her, I was attacked for some reason by Irene-san.....fortunately the misunderstanding was solved, but, Priscilal-san said that she wanted to thank me no matter what....."

Ayato was counting on his fingers while searching his memory.

"At that point, you have learned that those two will be our next opponents, right?"

"Yeah, since Irene told me."

"And knowing that, you still accepted the invitation?"

"No, I also thought that it wasn't a good idea after all, but I couldn't refuse."

Ayato said so while scratching his cheek.

"Besides, we may be enemies in the Festa, but there's nothing other than that....."

"You're naive!"

Julis raised her eyes and yelled at Ayato.

"Leaving aside the example of the matter with Cyrus, this city is the haunt of wicked men, who can even catch a weasel asleep. Those, who entrap others for themselves, and those, who used tricks, are a dime a dozen. What would you do if it was a trap?"

"I-It's all right. Both of them don't seem to be such bad people.....well, Irene-san can certainly be dangerous sometimes though."

"That's why I said that you're naïve. If humans, who plot an evil deed, were all villains, one would have no trouble. Don't trust people that easily."

Her opinion was quite right.

However.

"Then, how about you, Julis?"

"What?"

"We have formed a tag in the Phoenix, but if both of us are to participate in the Lindvolus, it means that we will be enemies, right? At that time, must I also doubt Julis?"

From the beginning, Ayato did not intend to participate in the Lindvolus. Since becoming Julis' strength was the reason for the current Ayato's fight, he was just speaking of an assumption.

"Ugh.....t-that's....."

It might be a slightly unfair way of saying it, but the effect seemed to be immediate.

Julis mumbled with a complicated expression—

"Haa.....I understand. Do as you wish."

She greatly sighed as she soon gave up.

"However! I just have one condition."

"One condition?"

Julis thrust her finger at Ayato, who asked a question in return.

"—you shall let me accompany you there, too."

---

The evening of the next day.

The address, which Priscilal gave him, was that of a room of a mansion in the residential area.

Though it was not to the degree of being called a high-class mansion, it was a neat building with a clean and stylish feeling.

"Since you said that you were invited to dinner, I thought it would be in a restaurant.....why is it in a mansion?"

"No, don't ask me."

Since Ayato was surprised as well, he could not answer in any way.

"I hope that it's not really some kind of trap....."

Taking along the suspicious Julis with him, he headed towards the designated room.

Then, the door quickly opened and Priscilal dressed in an apron welcomed them with a big smile.

"Welcome! Ah, you are Riessfield-san, right? I am sorry to not have been able to greet you the other day."

"Ah, no, likewise....."

"Now, please come in without reserve. I will immediately prepare the dishes."

As he entered the room with Julis, who was completely taken aback, there was a table set in the living room, which was neatly cleaned up, and Irene was sitting in one of the chairs with a sour look. As expected, she was not in her uniform figure, but she was roughly dressed in a T-shirt and jeans.

".....Yo."

As Irene turned her gaze to Ayato and Julis for an instant, she soon faced away again. From the start, since Ayato did not seem to agree even though Irene invited him, one could say that it was natural.

Though too contrastive to Priscilal's interaction, it seemed rather good for Julis.

Her habitual smile full of confidence returned, and she sat down to the front of Irene across the table.

"My greetings, Violent Vampire Princess(Lamilexia). Is it the attitude to keep in front of your guests?"

".....I don't remember inviting you, Petalblaze Witch(Gruene Rose)."

"Hmph, as you know, this softhearted fool is my tag partner. I will be troubled if something were to happen to him. So, well, I accompanied him."

Then, Irene revealed a teasing smile.

"You seem quite worried about him. Are you his mother or what?"

"W-Who's a mother?"

Julis and Irene were checking each other in that way, but strangely there was not that much a serious atmosphere there. It looked like both knew the boundary line.

While thinking that in a sense they were getting along well, Ayato also sat next to Julis.

"Thank you for waiting."

Priscilal carried the dishes there.

Many cooking which were probably appetizers and were dished up in small plates were lined up in the table.

"There are chickpeas and salad of tomato, aioli of potato, fried garlic pepper shrimp, and Segovia style mushrooms."

"Oh! I was waiting for this!"

"Onee-chan! Watch your manners!"

Irene promptly stretched out her hands to a dish with a smile never seen until here, but Priscilal hit and stopped it.

"Eeeeh! Isn't it fine, just a little?"

"It's not fine! In the first time, if Onee-chan is the first to start eating although this is made to thank Amagiri-san today.....Oh!"

"Bon appetit!"

Irene, without paying attention to what Priscilal said, casually picked up a dish.

"Geez, Onee-chan!"

As Julis chuckled when seeing it, she softly whispered in Ayato's ear.

"I see, it seems that the Violent Vampire Princess(Lamilexia) is also a caring person."

"Hmmm?"

"She probably intends to test it for poison."

Julis said so and slightly shook her shoulders.

"Hey, you guys should also eat. Priscilal's cooking is the best, you know?"

Irene was continuously stuffing her mouth with a huge appetite while saying so.

Priscilal seeming to have already given up sighed and turned her gaze towards Ayato and Julis.

"I am sorry, both of you."

"No, it's alright. Well, then let's also eat."

Like that, the meal began without debate, and there was no lie to Irene's words.

".....I- It's delicious."

Julis, who ate a mouthful of mushrooms, muttered as she was surprised.

In fact, all the dishes were very delicious. They were not at all high class dishes, but they had a homely warm taste, which let one feel relieved. Nevertheless, a little ingenuity was properly added.

"Wow, thank you."

"Fufufu, right?"

Irene proudly stuck out her chest.

".....It's not really like you are the one being praised, you know?"

Though Julis was amazed, Irene seemed to be above all happy that Priscilal was praised.

"Ah, come to think of it, it's a bit late, but.....what kind of room is this?"

Ayato remembered a question that he had completely forgotten and asked.

Then, Irene who was gulping down a drink curtly said.

"It's the room that I usually use; what about it?"

"That you usually use.....and what about the dorm?"

All the six academies of Asterisk required all the students to live in its dormitories. As a general rule, it was not admitted that a student lived in the city area.

"There is such a privilege to the Top Twelve of Le Wolfe. Of course, it doesn't mean I'm saying openly."

"So, I also often come here to clean up and cook, but.....however much I said to Onee-chan, she refuses to return to her room in the dorm."

Priscilal said so and smiled wryly.

"But, it was safe this time. Since after all, I could not have both of you come to Le Wolfe."

"I should say as expected of Le Wolfe, it has a dreadful freedom....."

"But, why expressly a room outside of the dorm?"

Though he thought whether the dorm of Le Wolfe was that harsh an environment, he immediately understood that it was wrong.

".....The entertainment district is near from here. It's somehow convenient."

Irene answered with a slightly upset face while energetically eating.

"I see. The business of night amusement, huh."

As Julis sarcastically said so, Irene frowned further.

"It's not like I'm spending my time playing. I only make money since I need it."

"Money.....?"

Julis's hand stopped to those words.

"Which reminds me, I heard from Ayato. Seemingly, you had trouble with some illegal casinos."

".....So what?"

"If it's only to earn money, there are many other ways to earn it. Why necessary take such risks?"

"Other ways, eh.....then, tell me those ways."

Irene laughed in a somewhere self-scorn feeling.

"Whether I tell you or whatever, isn't it for that precise reason that you participate in the Phoenix, now?"

"Ah, I see. If I'm not mistaken, you also come here in order to earn money, right Petalblaze Witch?"

"Wha-!? How do you.....!"

"The intelligence agency of Le Wolfe is excellent, you know?"

Seeing the flustered Julis, Irene simmeringly rumbled her throat.



"But you know, both our circumstances and positions are different. Even if I were to win the Phoenix, my wish has already been granted. It's such a contract."

"Contract, you say?"

To the suspicious Julis, Irene set a glance towards Priscilal for an instant.

"—Ah, then I will shortly go looking after the oven."

Priscilal left her seat with an ambiguous smile, and headed towards the kitchen.

Irene exhaled after confirming it, and let her chair slightly creak.

"Simply put, I'm the pawn of the student council president of Le Wolfe Black Institute, Dirk Eberwein. Long time ago, I had borrowed a huge amount of money to that bastard Dirk, and already had my wish fulfilled. And then, by following his orders, I'm clearing my debts little by little."

"The 'Unscrupulous King(Tyrant)', huh....."

Julis sank into silence with an unpleasant face.

That name also rang a bell for Ayato. Even in Asterisk, while countless bad rumors emerge from the infamous person close enough to contend for first place, on the other hand, he hasn't once even heard one good rumor.

"The contract is made so that my participations in the Festa are limited, and that even if I was to win, I would not be able to assign the reward as repayment. Well, he probably wants to use me as his pawn as long as possible. Really, what a nasty bastard, that guy."

Irene said so and shrugged her shoulders.

"That said, I also don't want to work forever under him. That's why, in order to return the money as soon as possible, I make painful efforts night after night."

"Is that debt such a great amount of money?"

"Who knows how many decades it will take to return the money if I were to work legitimately."

It must be a considerable amount.

"—I see. So that means, the fact that you participate in this Phoenix is due to Eberwein's suggestion, huh. There is a purpose other than winning the Phoenix, right?"

Irene loosened her lips grinning to Julis' pointing out and looked at Ayato.

"Good deduction. The instruction that I received this time from Dirk is — to crush you, Amagiri Ayato."

"What!?"

Though Julis promptly stood up, she did not feel hostility from Irene.

—At least, not yet now.

"Why do you expressly tell us that?"

Even if it was true, there would be no need to say it.

"I also have what you call honor, you know? I owe you for having saved Priscila. At this rate, it would be difficult to settle it.....it's like that, so sit down, Petalblaze Witch. I don't intend to dabble here."

".....Why does Eberwein target Ayato?"

Though still on guard, Julis slowly sat down.

"According to what Dirk says, it seems that he wants to crush Amagiri before it's too late, because the ogre lux that he used is something troublesome."

"The Demon Sword of The Black Furnace (Ser-Versta)? Certainly, that is a powerful ogre lux, but will he go that far just for that?"

To Julis' question, Irene nodded as she also agreed.

"I'm of the same opinion. Dirk is the cold-blooded brute worst bastard, but he's not incompetent or a coward. Since that guy is that much cautious, there should be some bigger reason."

As Irene said up to there, she turned towards Ayato.

"I don't know what Dirk is plotting, but there is one that I was able to guess from his way of talking. It seems like he also happened to meet the previous user of that ogre lux with his own eyes before."

"—!"

To those words, Ayato unintentionally half-rose to his feet.

"It's strange. As far as I have looked into the past loan records available to the public, there should not have been any user of that ogre lux in this last decade. And yet where and how did he see it....."

His heart was heavily beating fast.

In other words, it meant that Dirk Eberwein knew the person, that is Ayato's older sister — Amagiri Haruka, who had used Ser-Versta before Ayato.

"I thought that around there, there might be the reason why you are targeted, but.....it seemed like I was dead on mark."

"Well.....yes, probably. Anyway thank you."

The reason why Ayato came over to Asterisk was in order to discover a goal to seek after. Since his older sister left the house from her own will, there was surely probably some sort of reason there. Therefore, he did not think to forcibly find out about it. It proved how much Ayato believed to his older sister.

Nonetheless.....It would be a lie to say that he was not interested.

And all the more since he found some clues.

"Okay, well then, with this I pay my debt."

When Irene said with a refreshed face, Priscilal appeared with a big iron pan.

"Sorry for keeping you waiting. There are the seafood and Paella mushroom."

It, which spread a fragrant smell with a sizzling sound, looked quite delicious.

"Fufufu, Priscilal's Paella is really a great masterpiece. Eat with care."

"Stop bragging, Onee-chan. Come on, serve it quickly."

To Irene, who proudly stuck her chest, Priscilal responded with an embarrassed face.

(Onee-chan, huh.....)

Looking at those two figures, Ayato felt an emotion, which he could not put into words, welling up within him.

---

"Well, then it's almost time to go home."

"Yeah, indeed."

Having drunk coffee after finishing the meal, Ayato and Julis looked at each other and stood up.

"Huh, already? You can take it easy a little more....."

"Stop, Priscilal. Even if you want that badly to be friends with them, tomorrow, we will confront anyway. We have each other finished with our business, so it's already enough, right?"

Irene said so while holding back Priscilal who tried to stop them.

"But....."

"I don't like it, but it doesn't change the fact that I'm still moving by Dirk's order. With this, I won't have to hesitate anymore, and tomorrow I will crush you to my heart's content. If you don't like it, you should quickly give up."

".....Go easy on me."

Ayato replied to it with a wry smile and left the room.

"Ah, then, I can at least see you off.....!"

Though Priscilal quickly ran after them, Irene did not feel like stopping her.

"Thank you for the meal today, Priscilal-san. It was delicious."

"No, don't mention it. Um, I am sorry for everything caused by my sister."

Priscilal was going to bow her head in a humble manner, but Julis stopped her kindly.

"No, it's not like I don't understand the Violent Vampire Princess(Lamilexia)'s point, too. Don't think badly of me, but we will also fight with all our might tomorrow."

"That.....I understand."

Priscilal hung her head dejectedly.

"Priscilal-san, I see you don't like fighting that much."

It might be natural for ordinary students, but when it came to the students of this Asterisk — and what's more, the students of Le Wolfe, it should be pretty rare.

But certainly, there was no doubt that Priscilal was a girl, who looked more lovely while cooking in an apron figure like today than in a figure of holding a weapon and fight.

Just an ordinary girl, which one found everywhere. That was Priscilal Urzaiz.

The reason for such a girl to dare stand on the stage of the Phoenix was—

".....My older sister is fighting for my sake. That's why I cannot run away."

"Even if your blood is sucked?"

That sight was quite shocking.

However, Priscilal faintly shook her head to Julis' words.

"That much is nothing. Since I am only protected by Onee-chan all the time until now, I am glad that I can at least help her, even if a little. Just....."

Priscilal stopped her words there.

"Just?"

"—When my older sister is using Gravi-Sheath<sup>[31]</sup>, she is a little scary."

As Ayato urged her, she said so in a faint voice.

"At first I thought that maybe it was because she was not yet familiar with the weapon, but.....how should I put it, my sister, while she is using that, is somewhat really berserk, as if she is a different person — and recently, it's more and more....."

Priscilal, who seemed to mutter almost all she was saying, suddenly raised her face there.

"S-Sorry! For saying such a strange thing....."

While lightly waving both her hands, Priscilal apologized.

In the meantime Ayato and Julis, who arrived at the entry of the mansion, bid farewell there.

"See you later."

They waved their hands to Priscilal, who deeply bowed her head, and left the mansion.

".....Julis, what do you think?"

After walking the night cityscape illuminated by the streetlights for a while, Ayato suddenly asked.

"About Gravi-Sheath? Well now, from my perspective, I don't see the difference with when the Violent Vampire Princess(Lamilexia) is violent normally.....what, don't tell me you feel needless compassion?"

"No.....No, well, it's true, but it's not like that."

As Ayato pouted, Julis smiled wryly and shrugged her shoulders.

"Fufufu, I'm kidding. I know what you're trying to say, but — even so, it's a fact that there is nothing that we can do about it."

".....Yeah."

She certainly had a point.

"We have our own fight to think about. So we should first concentrate on it."

---

『Oh my, Ayato. What is it at such a time?』

That day, as Ayato, who returned to his room, contacted Claudia on her portable terminal, the space window opened after the hold time for a while.

Lately, since Eishiro did not come back for days under the pretext of summer vacation, there was no need to be careful.

"Sorry for suddenly contacting you, Claudia. There is something I want to consult you with."

『I am glad to receive a contact from Ayato for a consultation. What kind of business is it?』

"—A little about ogre lux."

As Ayato said so, on the other side of the window, Claudia's calm face became just a little tense.

『.....I see, then it would be better to directly meet and talk about it. So let's meet now — is what I would like to say, but unfortunately my schedule is still tight. I will finish in a slightly late time, but is it all right?』

"Yeah, I leave it to you."

『Then.....well, let's say at 12:00 tonight, in my room.』

"Ugh.....I-I understand."

He wanted to avoid sneaking into the girl dorm if possible, but since it was him, who asked, he could not say no.

"By the way Claudia, are you all right?"

『? About what?』

"You look a bit tired."

Claudia had her calm smile as usual, but she looked like she somewhere lacked vigor.

Then, it was rare to see Claudia frankly open her eyes wide with a surprised face.

『Ara.....you noticed well.』

"Yeah well, somehow."

『Fufufu, I don't know whether you are really sharp or dull. But, it proves how much you pay attention to me.』

Claudia saying so looked somewhat happy.

『I was just a little busy with work, otherwise I am all right. Thank you for your concern. Then later again.』

When the space window shut, Ayato checked the time. The needles of the watch pointed 9:00 p.m.



"Work until late at night, huh.....it's difficult being student council president."

Since Ayato's match was ahead tomorrow, in reality he wanted to rest his body a little early. However, it was not sure whether he could catch (meet) Claudia before tomorrow's match.

"I only hope that I'm thinking too much....."

As Ayato muttered so, he turned his gaze outside of the window.

A red big moon was floating slightly eerily there.

Sneaking into the girl dorm at night was not something he got used to no matter how many times he did it.

Managing somehow to reach Claudia's room while breaking an unpleasant sweat, he knocked at the window.

The key seemed to be opened, but there was also no reply this time like last time.

As he had no choice but to intrude since he could not cling to the wall forever, a faint light was drifting within the dim room.

Several space windows, which were still kept opened, were fluffily floating.

Looking closely, Claudia was sleeping as she fell prostrate in the desk along the wall. To her figure illuminated with the pale light of the space windows, there was a slightly fantastic beauty.

Ayato was fascinated for an instant, but he soon noticed that the situation was strange. For someone, who was only just sleeping, her expression was strangely steep.

Strongly furrowing her brows, she occasionally separated her pink lips and a gasp of agony leaked.

(Is she seeing some bad dream.....?)

Anyway, it would be better to wake her up.

The moment when Ayato, who was thinking so, opened his mouth—

"!?"

Two gleaming silver streaks had torn through the darkness and attacked Ayato.

One could even say that the fact he avoided it was luck. At least, it was originally not an attack that the current Ayato could evade.

It was just because his ogre lux activated and there was a little time before expanding the blade, that even the Ayato in sealed state could dodge it.

"Claudia.....?"

Still unable to figure out the situation, Ayato stepped back until the window and called out.

"....."

However, Claudia, who slowly stood up without reply, loosely hung down both her hands and set up the ominous twin swords — Pan-Dora.

Though the light coming in from the window illuminated Claudia, her expression could not be discerned because she was looking downward.

"W-Wait a minute! Claudia!"



At that moment, Claudia moved.

While seeming to be advancing slowly, in the next moment she had already entered Ayato's range. Ayato instantaneously released his power and simultaneously slipped through and dodged the twin swords drawn from all directions.

—Or so it seemed.

"Wow!"

The blade, which he thought that he should have dodged, came back by drawing an arc and approached before his eyes. It was an attack which looked as if the twin swords were predicting Ayato's movements.

Although Ayato twisted his body and somehow managed to avoid it, he broke his balance and fell down on his back to the floor. As Claudia sat astride Ayato as is in a fluid motion, she silently raised the twin swords.

"Claudia!"

Ayato called her name the third time, and stretched out his hand almost in desperation.

His fingertips slightly — just a little touched Claudia's cheeks.

"!"

Just as Claudia's body shivered with surprise, she suddenly stopped the arm raised.

"Aya...to?"

Claudia was looking down at Ayato for a while with a dumbfounded face, but she suddenly jumped back as she came back to her senses.

"S-Sorry, Ayato! What have I done.....!"

Surprise and regret and above all an intense agitation appeared on Claudia's face. It was his first time seeing Claudia revealing such emotions.

Anyway, as he seemed to be safe for the time being, he heaved a sigh of relief.

On the other hand, Claudia put Pan-Dora on standby and turned her back on Ayato. While heavily breathing for a while as it is, she fixed her breathing.

"—I am really sorry. It seemed that I, of all people, was a little careless."

And when she once more turned around to Ayato, she had already returned to the usual Claudia. She deeply bowed her head apologetically.

"Yes, I was indeed surprised.....what on earth was that?"

Ayato said so while raising his body and smiled wryly.

Honestly, it won't be a lie if one were to say that he felt more dead than alive. Claudia's sword was sharp with an unmatched accuracy, which was in no way inferior compared to Kirin's. Of course, from the perspective of skill (technique), Kirin's was more complete, but there was no doubt that Claudia possessed an extraordinary skill (technique).

"Well.....from where should I start to explain....."

Claudia was slightly lost in her thought, but she immediately came to her senses with a sense.

"All right, since this is a good opportunity, let's talk about it. It's probably not unrelated to what Ayato wants to know."

".....What do you mean?"

Claudia recommended the sofa to Ayato, who tilted his head in wonder, and she herself sat down in the chair, in which she was sitting until a while ago.

"Before that Ayato, would you please hear one request of mine?"

"One request?"

Claudia's pupils straightly gazed at Ayato.

"Though it's a matter for the future, I would like you to take part in the Gryps next year as a member of my team."

"The Gryps, huh....."

He was a little surprised at those unexpected words, but his answer was already decided.

"Sure. But only if Julis is with us."

Ayato had promised Julis to be her strength. And Julis said that she aimed the grand slam. Though it was impossible in the Lindvolus, which was for individual matches, as long as Julis did not say "no", he also intended to fight in the Gryps with her.

"I expected that answer, but.....honestly, I am envious."

Claudia revealed a lonely smile.

"But, there is no problem at that point. Since it was also my intention to invite Julis to the team. And I think that she won't probably refuse, either."

Since Julis' objective was the grand slam, she would naturally desire stronger teammates. If so, it was unlikely for her to turn down Claudia's invitation.

It seemed like Claudia had already concretely set up quite a strategy for the Gryps.

"And how are the matter of earlier and the Gryps related?"

"It was just to make sure that you will be a teammate before revealing the secret."

Claudia said so and once again activated Pan-Dora.

There being also the matter of earlier, as expected his body reacted twitchily.

"Fufufu, do not worry. I will not do anymore what I did earlier.....by the way Ayato, have you experienced death before?"

"Eh.....?"

Ayato looked back at Claudia with a blank expression.

"E-Errr.....I don't understand the meaning of the question."

"Just take it as it means."

".....No, you would not be in this realm if you were dead, right?"

It's not like you're a zombie.

"—I am already dead more than 12000 times."

"Haa?"

Ayato looked at Claudia with the same blank face as earlier.

He had no idea of what Claudia was taking about.

While seeming to enjoy looking at such Ayato, Claudia raised Pan-Dora and showed him.

"The price that this child requests from its user is 'to taste your own death'. Whenever I sleep, I personally experience 'the moment of my death to come someday' in my dream."

"You personally experienced the moment you die.....?"

Claudia had frankly said so (and shown him) but, wasn't that obviously a terrible torture?

"The disgusting side of this child is that it doesn't just show the one same manner of death. It really admires how there are many ways of dying for people. From accidental deaths to deaths from illness, freezing to death, starving to death, suicide, and.....death given by someone. From all of that the one thing certain was that 'someday I will probably have a certain death'."

But, Claudia's tone, which did not change, was calm and gentle.

"Since I was just about to be killed earlier too, it seems I had unintentionally attacked while I was half asleep. I am sorry."

Claudia, who said so, once again bowed her head.

"When I wake up, the contents of the dream disappear as if melting. What is left is a fragmentary memory, the pain and fear of being on the verge of the death, and a sense of fatigue. While possessing the extraordinary ability to see the future, the reason why someone able to master this child did not appear is it. It seems that those, who owned this child before me, could hardly bear it for three days."

She said so while laughing merrily, but the content was extremely appalled.

".....I'm surprised you're okay, Claudia."

"Yeah. Things like today also often occurred, but I surprisingly got used to it."

"But....."

As he recalled her painful sleeping face of earlier, it did not look like it.

"Fufufu, I am happy. Do you worry about me?"

"Isn't that obvious?"

As he responded with a serious look to Claudia's teasing tone, Claudia, after being a little surprised, was slightly bashful.

".....I think that I also mentioned it before, but I have a wish that I wanted granted. This child is absolutely necessary for that purpose."

"Then.....What is Claudia's wish?"

"It is — still a secret."

Claudia slowly shook her head.

Everyone came over this city with a wish that they want to fulfill.

In order to fulfill that wish, he sought power in order to win and win.

It might be to be a matter of course.

Nonetheless—

"Well, let's return to the topic. Thus, the more the ogre lux's ability is powerful, the more the price tends to be severe. For example, if your Ser-Versta was in the hands of an average Starpulse Generation, it would consume a large quantity of prana so as to dry him up in no time; in the first place, the fact itself that the high compatibility rating appears, is rare. In other words, you could also say that the high hurdle to own it is included in the price."

Claudia cut her words once there.

Both her smile and her tone completely returned to their usual tune.

"In fact, since the price varies depending on the ogre lux, it cannot unconditionally be generalized. I guess that what Ayato wants to know is something, which is related around this topic, right?"

It seemed like she was right on the line. In that case, it saved the long talk.

Ayato directly cut to the chase.



"—Claudia, what do you know about Gravi-Sheath?"

"About that ogre lux, I have no more data than what I have handed to you."

"Not the data, I want to hear Claudia's opinion. As a user of an ogre lux."

As Ayato grumbled "even though you knew what I mean", Claudia shook her shoulders with a chuckle.

"Well.....as you know, ogre lux possess a will. Do you understand what it means?"

"Eh? Errr.....Hmm....."

Though Ayato inquired so and was thinking about it, the appropriate answer did not seem to come in mind.

He frankly surrendered and lightly raised both his hands.

"Fufufu, it is the same as humans. Having a will means having a personality, and having a personality means that one can roughly classify them by demarcation."

"Roughly classify.....?"

"In order words, good-natured ogre lux and ill-natured ogre lux."

".....I see."

Same as humans, huh.

"Well, there are many other ways to say it. For example, you can also say ogre lux friendly with humans and ogre lux not friendly with humans."

"If I go by that example, which one do you think Ser-Versta is?"

"He — oh, sorry. It might be "her". Anyway, I think that that kid has a relatively good personality. Well, he seems to have a somewhat rebellious nature though."

"Then, what about Pan-Dora?"

"Fufufu, this child already has the worst personality. It's a good match with me though."

Claudia held the mouth as if it was funny.

It was indeed like Claudia to declare such a thing on her own.

"Then — what about Gravi-Sheath?"

"That kid is....."

Then Claudia cast down her eyes just a little.

"I do not really want to speak ill of another kid, but he has a somewhat dangerous feeling."

".....As expected, Claudia also thinks so?"

Ayato was also of the same opinion.

That ogre lux was dangerous. Not its ability.

If borrowing Claudia's words, then its personality is.....

"Anyway, since I have yet to see it, it is only my impression, but it looks to me that that kid is quite selfish. That kind of ogre lux often interferes with its user."

"Interferes.....?"

"Hmm, it is misleading to say "take over", but it means that the ogre lux altered the user's will and personality to its own liking. The longer you use it, the more notable it becomes. And much more, that kid has influence to the extent of also physically altering its user."

Ayato took a deep breath and looked up at the ceiling.

—In other words, it was probably like that.

"Thank you, Claudia. It was really helpful."

"Do not mention it; are you going back already?"

"Since I have a match tomorrow. I have to rest soon."

"Ara....."

Then, Claudia bewitchingly laughed and openly put on coquettish airs.

"Then, I do not mind even if you sleep here."

"N-No, I will pass.....!"

Ayato hurriedly stood up and rushed up to the window.

However, when he put a foot on the window frame, he suddenly turned his face.

"Oh, that's right. About the matter of nee-san..... the student council president of Le Wolfe seems to know something about it."

"Dirk Eberwein?"

Claudia asked back as she was surprised.

"May be, he has happened to meet nee-san before."

".....I understand. I will check this a little as well."

"Yeah, thank you."

After saying so and bowing, Ayato opened the window.

Returning a smile to Claudia's voice hung from behind while saying "Good luck for tomorrow's match", Ayato let his body jump in the darkness of the night.

## Chapter 7 – The Bloody Scythe of Supreme Destruction(Gravi-Sheath)

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Power is necessary in order to protect something, and a stronger power is necessary in order to obtain something.

Without power, one cannot but lose.

And in order to get back what is lost, a much stronger power is necessary.

That was Irene Urzaiz's creed.

The power struggle of the Integrated Enterprise Foundation was intense; hence the political situation was always unstable, and there were small countries of Southern Europe, which were stuck and sinking little by little into the swamps completely — of such countries, a forsaken ruin-like town was Irene's birthplace.

In this era, where the population was concentrated in big cities, and the extreme unipolarization became natural, the humans, who were living in such places were mostly poor. The government system of the Integrated Enterprise Foundation always required a fixed number of economically weak people. Irene's family was no exception, too.

In such a family, if a Starpulse Generation child were to be born, there was no way that it would not be pleased. The discrimination towards the Starpulse Generation was so far away from the urban areas that it became remarkable, but at the same time it was a money tree for the poor. The Starpulse Generation were valued best when being scouted by the academies of Asterisk and playing an active role, by PMC and related defense/security, and by criminal syndicates at worst.

Irene had presumed early the expectation of such parents. Even so, she did not loathe them, but she did not feel a deep affection towards them, either. This was because, for Irene the sole object of concern was her little sister who was also a Starpulse Generation like her.

Unlike her, who was violent and crude, her little sister was gentle, brave and dearly loved her above all.

For Irene, her little sister was the only person, whom she could turn a deep affection towards, and at the same time the only person, who would return it without compensation.

Then one day, that little sister suffered a serious injury. She was caught up in the collapse of an old building.

The majority of the buildings of the old century, which had been abandoned since the Ember Tears, had already reached their life span, and they were known as dangerous. Even so, the poor with no other places to live, could only cling there.

Originally, it was a serious injury to the extent that even a Starpulse Generation could lose his life, but her little sister had recovered the next day. It was at that time she realized that her little sister was a Regenerative.

Regarding the Starpulse Generation, the potential aptitude test of ability users was obligatory in their childhood in any country. However, the government functions being not operational in the integrity in those (poor) countries, they were hardly functioning, particularly in non-urban areas. In fact, the non-registered ability users were not few.

And, those guys<sup>[32]</sup> always searched for such ability users.

"—You see, Priscila. These people say that they want you to help them out. Will you go?"

Sure enough, Frauenlob — the scout of Allekant came shortly thereafter.

With a soft, coaxing voice, the mother put her hand on the little sister's shoulder, and the father signed the contract with a satisfied look. On that contract, there were the characters for Dedicated Scholarship Student of the infamous Allekant. No matter what is done or what happens, the subject cannot voice any complaints, so to speak.

The next day, Irene took her little sister and left the house.

She did not think that she could succeed in escaping, and it was not as if she had somewhere to go, either.

However, she knew that if she did not do so, she would have lost her little sister. Only that, she could never accept.

"—Yo, are you Irene Urzaiz?"

In the deserted house where the two girls were hiding, it was three days after leaving the house that that man appeared in front of them.

He was plump, with darkish red hair and of short stature. His expression was sullenly distorted, and his eyes were dazzlingly and strangely shining.

Irene first thought that he was a pursuer from Allekant, but he did not had such an atmosphere about him. Above all, there was an emblem of crossed twin swords that was attached to the man's chest.

"Try to use it."

As the man said so, he threw a Lux's activation tool towards Irene.

As Irene touched it while being on her guard, and at that moment, a piercing shock ran through her body.

At the same time, she understood.

This is "power".

The Lux activated, and a huge scythe giving off purple phosphorescence appeared. She felt a violent energy rising in her body.

As the man, who saw it, slightly moved his eyebrows, he once again opened his mouth.

".....Hmm, you passed. All right, let me hear your wish."

She did neither understand the situation nor knew who the man in front of her was, but even so Irene answered without hesitation. Of course, Irene only had one wish.

And as long as that wish came true, she was even ready to sell her soul to the devil.

Without particularly changing his expression even hearing it, after the man took out his portable terminal and had a conversational exchange with somewhere for a while, he then plainly said.

"Right now, I have repurchased your little sister. It was a little expensive, but I will have you pay back a part of it by working."

As the man only said so, he turned around his back.

But, he suddenly stopped on the way, turned his small head and gazed at Irene and Priscilal.

"Don't just forget this. It's not Le Wolfe that has saved you. But me. Therefore, it's not Le Wolfe that will use you, but me. Okay?"

Now that she thought about it, only the point being sent from Allekant to Le Wolfe changed, it probably didn't necessarily mean that something was resolved.

Even so, in order to take back Priscilal to Dirk, she was given necessary time, chance and above all "power".

And, it was enough for her.

".....Onee-chan? It's about time."

As she opened her eyes to that voice, Priscilal was looking into her face with an anxious expression.

—In a waiting room of Sirius Dome. By checking the time, she thought that it would be indeed bad if they did not soon go to the stage.

"All right, then, let's settle the task."

As Irene said so and stood up from the sofa, she gently stroked Priscilal's head.

"Don't worry. Everything will be all right as usual."

"Yeah....."

It was Irene, who always received orders from Dirk. Priscilal did not know anything and did not ask anything. However, she would only give her blood to Irene when needed.

Irene thought that it was better like that.

Whether it be standing on the place of the battle or dirtying her hands, she herself was enough. Such a thing did not suit Priscilal.

She already did so up to there, and it would never change even in the future.

"Well, that said, those two indeed aren't your average opponents. It'll be hard if I don't go all out from the start."

Irene said so and activated Gravi-Sheath<sup>[33]</sup>.

Priscilal, who saw it, revealed the nape of her neck as she understood.

A desire hard to resist, swelled up in Irene's heart, and she silently thrust her fangs into that white neck's nape.

"Ah....."

A thin voice leaked from Priscilal's mouth, and she understood that a taste of lukewarm iron went through her throat.

—Since when? Did she come to think that this taste was sweet, Irene wondered.

As a response, Gravi-Sheath trembled with joy.

She was in that state probably for a good minute.

As Irene released her mouth, she lovely caressed the deep scar, though it was small.

However, it disappeared at eye sight.

"I'm sorry for doing this always."

As Irene said so, Priscilal shook her head (in denial).

"No, this much is not a big deal. But—"

Irene tightly embraced Priscilal, who looked downward.

Priscilal muttered in Irene's arms in a small voice.

"I'm sorry, Onee-chan."

"Idiot. Why do you apologize?"

Once she completed the one task, with it she would be able to haul in Priscilal with her own hands.

Dirk was not a trustworthy man, but he never broke his promises.

So for now, she had no choice, but to fight.

---

"Well, it's about time."

To Julis' voice, Ayato suddenly raised his face.



"Ah, yeah. You're right."

".....What's wrong? It's not good to be lost in thought just before a match."

Julis put a hand on her waist and pouted.

Ayato smiled wryly and lightly waved his hands.

"No, it's nothing. Let's go."

"Hmm, then it's fine."

Julis had a face which showed that she was not yet convinced, but she took a glance at the watch and slightly exhaled.

Like that, the two people came out of the waiting room.

"Ayato"

Julis, who went ahead making footsteps with a clacking sound, said without looking back.

"Hmm?"

"I must win. No matter who the opponent is, I don't intend to concede his wish. That's why I'm here now."

".....Yeah."

"But — I'm also not going to dwell on how to win."

The long corridor leading to the stage seemed to be short.

Julis' voice slightly echoed and flowed behind.

"If we can win in the way you wish, then let just do so. We're partners after all. Let's cooperate and fight hand-in-hand. It's something normal, right?"

"Julis....."

Ayato stopped his footsteps and looked at Julis.

He bowed his head to Julis, who similarly stopped several steps ahead.

"—Thank you."

"Idiot. It's not something to be thankful for."

The cheeks of Julis, who slightly looked back just a little, were slightly dyed red as she felt embarrassed.

"So, what do you intend to do?"

"Uh huh, there's something I want to try. I don't know whether or not we can do it, but....."

As Ayato explained his intention, Julis opened her eyes wide as she was surprised.

"Yeah.....certainly, it's not as if there has been no precedent, but.....the opponent is that Gravi-Sheath, you know?"

"I know that it's difficult. But—"

To Ayato, who vigorously said, Julis responded with a wry smile.

"Haa.....I understand. Let's try it. But, there will probably be only one chance. If we fail, you will just have to give it up."

"Then, it won't be helped."

"It's fine if you understand. Okay — then, let's go."

And they gently held out their fists.

Ayato nodded and they bumped their fists against each other.

『Well then, the heated matches will continue at each venue for the fourth round! The finalists gracing this Sirius Dome are the Amagiri/Riessfeld pair of Seidokan Academy and the Urzaiz sisters of Le Wolfe Black Institute! Which tag team will advance to the best 16!』

『This is also a match to look forward to. Since either of them has won through the qualifier without almost letting their opponents get the slightest chance, I think that this will become one watershed.』

『Well then, here I would like Cham-san to give her conjecture about the outcome of this match. Since Gravi-Sheath, which is used by player Irene, has a bad fuel (prana) consumption<sup>[34]</sup>, will Seidokan be advantageous if it's a drawn-out battle after all?』

『Hmm well, I think that we can't unconditionally say that. Since player Irene has, so to speak, the supply line called player Priscila after all. Besides, in terms of comparison of the ability in itself.....』

"Hmph, as usual they speak as if it was that simple."

Julis to such live commentaries furrowed her eyebrows and grumbled.

Since Ayato had a limit, it was rather their side which could not draw out the battle.

From this point onward, aside from the first adjustment day of just entering, there was no resting day up until the finals.

If he released the seal for a long period of time, it was clear that the matches on and after next day would be difficult.

—However.

"Ayato, don't overdo it.....though it's probably useless to say it."

"After all, it's an opponent that we can't defeat without overdoing it."

Julis activated Aspera Spina and nodded.

"I agree. Let's go all out from the start."

Ayato returned a nod, fixed his breathing and raised his prana.

Magic circles appeared around Ayato, and the mana shone and burst. Power swelled up within his body and pain ran through all directions.

"—Secret sword bound by the prison of stars, release your might!"

The binding chains of imprisonment, which admonished all creations, were smashed up and power overflowed.

『There it appeared! Player Amagiri's performance, with which we are already familiar!』

『It's flashy whenever I see it.』

The gallery seethed all at once, and cheers flew about wildly.

"I see that you're highly motivated, Amagiri."

Irene, who placed Gravi-Sheath on her shoulder, lightly laughed while glaring at such Ayato.

Irene stepped forward alone, leaving Priscila behind.

"Well then, I'll also go all out.....!"

Gravi-Sheath emitted a purple light and mana weirdly wriggled.

The tension stretched—

"Phoenix fourth round 11th match, battle start!"

The mechanical voice announced the start of the battle.

"Bloom proudly — Flaming Crimson Decapitator(Livingstone Daisy)!"

Julis immediately activated her ability, and flame blew up from her surroundings.

The flame wound a swirl, turned into crimson chakrams<sup>[35]</sup>, and attacked Irene from all directions.

"Hahaha! What pretense!"

Irene easily cut down the chakrams, which amounted to about ten, with Gravi-Sheath.

But, at that opportunity (chance), Ayato shortened the distance at a stretch.

He was just barely running between the chakrams while holding Ser-Versta, and slashed at her from a low position.

"Oops!"

Irene stopped the blow with Gravi-Sheath and the two weapons' edges collided and sparks fell as if dancing.

Although Ser-Versta was an ogre lux, which cut through everything it touched, as the opponent had an ogre Lux of the same level, it seemed that it would not go so. He knew that by engaging in close range combat, he would gradually overcome his opponent's blade, but with that alone, he could not say that he had a particular advantage.

Since Ayato had expected this, he immediately changed his intention, and slashed at her torso while rotating it as he rolled up his body.

Irene repelled it with Gravi-Sheath, and like that she slashed down with an overhead chop, but Ayato's slash back was one step faster than it. As he dodged the diagonal cut to his shoulder as he promptly shifted his body, Ayato followed up with a thrust towards her in a flash.

Irene turned Gravi-Sheath around and defended against it using the blade as a shield. Sparks danced once again, but Ayato twisted his wrist after pulling once the point of his sword, and repelled Gravi-Sheath.

"Wha-!?"

He sliced down Ser-Versta aiming at her chest — her school badge, which became wide open.

Irene leapt back and dodged it by a hairbreadth, but her trademark muffler was torn and burnt down.

"Tch! To think I was pressed so far.....! As expected I'm at disadvantage when crossing blades, huh!"

Furthermore, the fiery chakrams sprung at Irene one after another as if they had been waiting for the timing when she dodged.

"—Tenfold Destroyer(Diez Fanega)!"

However, as Irene made one swing of Gravi-Sheath, black gravity balls appeared around her body, clashed with the chakrams and vanished each other.

『—Th-This is an amazing offense and defense from the very beginning! The combination of the players Amagiri and Riessfeld was impressive, but player Urzaiz, who outdid it, was even more amazing!』

『To dive into those three-dimensional mobile flames is amazing. Player Riessfeld is originally an owner of a splendid control, but player Amagiri could not readily do it if he did not trust very much.』

Ayato and Irene re-measured the distance between each other, and Julis kept her original distance and focused on her next skill.

"Hmm, it's not so bad for an improvised tag formed for one or two months."

As Irene said so while adjusting her breathing, Julis responded to it while setting Aspera Spina.

"You too, you really dodge it well even when alone."

"Hahaha! I'm not alone, we're also two here."

A ferocious light glowed in Irene's pupils and sharp fangs peeped out from her mouth as she broadly laughed.

"This is the power of both Priscila and I!"

Gravith-Sheath shook with a clattering sound, and a purple light streamed down the ground.

It looked as if it was laughing—

"Dodge it, Ayato!"

Ayato was already moving before Julis cried.

The air of the surroundings, where Ayato was until a while ago, violently shook.

Probably, the gravity around there was manipulated.

"Ho~u, you indeed have good reaction."

"I already saw it several times after all."

Ayato re-set Ser-Versta while carefully dropping his waist.

Gravi-Sheath gravity manipulation was a range specified type ability. Therefore, no matter what, a moment of time lag was generated before the activation. Average students would not probably cope with it, but for the current Ayato, it was possible to somehow evade it.

"But, did you think that you can conquer (capture) this Gravi-Sheath with that level?"

Within Irene's hand, Gravi-Sheath laughed once again.

" —!"

The purple light ran on the ground, but this time the range was much wider than earlier.

Ayato, who greatly leapt to the side, was not able to evade it, and was suddenly endowed with a heavy pressure.

"Eh.....?"

But, the body of such Ayato instead of being crushed, softly floated on the contrary.

"It's toilsome to make the gravity strong, but just weakening it is not really so. So, I can specify a wide range like this."

Ayato was floating at a height of about two meters.

Though he tried to move his limbs, even if he was a Starpulse Generation, he could not do anything in a state in which there was nothing to which he could apply his power. His limbs, flapping, cut the sky in vain and his body just turned around.

"Ayato!"

"Oops, you, just stay quiet here!"

Gravi-Sheath was swung towards Julis, who tried to hurriedly rush over, and a heavy pressure weighed on her body.

"Guh.....!"

Although Julis fell down as she rolled, and was going to stand up, it seemed that she could not even move a knee.

It was a degree of activation range that was not impossible for Julis with her reflexes to dodge, but seemingly, her move towards Ayato's side was completely read.

"Well then, my control is not as good as the Petalblaze Witch's, but in a case of an immobile target, then it's another issue. —Onefold Destroyer(Unofanega)!"

A gravity ball appeared before Irene's eyes, and exactly aimed at Ayato.

But, Irene suddenly fell to her knees.

"Tch, as expected, it's difficult to maintain three different abilities.....! Even though I refilled that much, it's already reached the bottom huh.....!"

Irene was painfully distorting her face.

Nevertheless, the ability was still lasting.

"Well, it's fine.....with this, it's over, Amagiri!"

The gravity balls were shot towards Ayato, and the very moment they were going to directly hit him—

"Bloom proudly — Six-Petal Burst Firebloom(Amaryllis).....!"

The fireballs shot by Julis, who was still lying on the ground, directly hit before the gravity balls.

"Guh!"

"What!?"

Ayato's body was blown off by a small explosion.

Ayato, who grumbly tumbled on the ground, still quickly rebuilt his stance, and frowned towards Julis.

".....I'm thankful that you've saved me, but wasn't there a more gentle way to do it?"

"It was still better than losing like that, right? Besides I held down the power to the minimum possible. So this level of power wouldn't have caused damage on someone like you with that much prana."

As Gravi-Sheath was dispelled, Julis, who was rushing over, returned a joke to Ayato.

On the other hand, though Irene still kept her eyes on Ayato, she was slowly retreating little by little. She was probably heading towards Priscila in order to refill blood.

"Julis!"

"I know! Bloom proudly — White Firebloom of the Sharp Spear(Longiflorum)!"

As Julis waved her thin sword, the spears of flames manifested along its trajectory.

It was the best chance now that Irene could not use Gravi-Sheath's ability. There was no way that they would be silent and just watch.

Ayato also ran off a moment later behind the spears of flames that were shot and were tearing through the air.

—However.

"—Heavy Reed Prison(Orreaga Pesado)"

The spears of flames were stopped by a purple wall — no, it was rather more like jail grate — which suddenly appeared to grow from the ground.

Ayato also hurriedly braked just in front of it.



It seemed that thin rods, which were vertically stretched gravity balls, were linked in a grid pattern.

"Setting type Defense ability.....!"

Though Julis bit her lips in frustration, Irene arrived at Priscilal's side in the meantime.

"Hahaha. At the time this insolent person went and sniped not at me but Priscilal, I had prepared an ace up my sleeve as a precaution. It can't be easily destroyed."

Irene lightly laughed on the other side of the wall, and thrust her fangs at Priscilal's neck as she showed off.

If it was Ser-Versta, it could break through the wall, but Ayato would no longer make it in time.

".....with this, I'm fully restored."

As Ayato, who sighed, checked the time, two minutes had soon passed since the battle started.

Ideally speaking, they wanted to bring down the opponent in one minute, but.....

"Ayato!"

Julis called Ayato with a sharp voice.

"What's the matter?"

"—The preparations are complete. If you want to try that, do it quickly."

As Ayato turned back, Julis briefly said that in low voice as she whispered into his ear.

".....Roger."

Ayato also returned a nod and tightly grasped Ser-Versta.

The following move was a special of Julis. Its success or failure would probably influence the outcome of the battle.

If so, taking the time into consideration, there were not many chances left for Ayato.

『—If we can win in the way you desire, then let's do so.』

He recalled Julis' words before the battle.

It seemed that he had no choice but to try to aim for it before Julis' bold move activated.

".....Yo, I kept you waiting. Well then, shall we go for the second round?"

As the wall soon disappeared as if melting, Irene stepped forward while wiping her lips.

Behind her, Priscila lied down completely exhausted, and she was roughly breathing.

Ayato, who saw it, sadly knitted his brows.

"Do you think that that way of doing things is really correct?"

".....Shut up, Amagiri. You don't have to tell such a thing at this late hour."

"If that's the case—"

"You shut up I said!"

A purple shine ran on the ground at the same time Irene raised Gravi-Sheath.

Irritated Ayato greatly leapt back, and escaped the activation range of the ability. The range was also further wider than earlier, but Ayato reacted early just as much as he also grew accustomed to it.

"So restless.....!"

As expected, it seemed that she would not listen if not by force.

Ayato resolved himself and set up Ser-Versta to the side.

"Bloom proudly — Dancing nine-spirering-flower(Primrose)!"

Julis' support entered there.

"You're annoying! Hundred fold Funeral Procession(Cien Guesta)!"

But, Irene brandished Gravi-Sheath. A purple wave motion ran like an aurora, and the primroses of flame, that lovely fluttered about, were all crushed and vanished in the air.

Even so, Ayato turned around from the right side to the slight opening and jumped into Irene's bosom.

"Amagiri Bright Dragon Style First Sword Fighting Skill — <Twin Water Dragons>!"

Returning his arm from mowing down the blow, he stepped further in and tied it with a rising slash from the bottom.

"Tch!"

A powerful impact sounded and an afterglow burst forth.

Irene somehow defended against it with Gravi-Sheath, but her stance was greatly destroyed. Ayato did not miss the chance and swung Ser-Versta downward with all his might, aiming at Gravi-Sheath.

"Wha-!?"

Ser-Versta's maneuverability was not effective since it was somewhat large, but it was also the same for Gravi-Sheath. Although the blow driven into the engine chamber, where the Ulm mana dote was embedded, was blocked by the purple light and the power had been considerably spoiled, there was a clear response as such.

Gravi-Sheath emitted a shrill sound like a scream, and in a place where Ayato was trying to inflict another blow, he was suddenly sent flying by an invisible power.

"Urgh!"

It was probably Gravi-Sheath's ability. Ayato immediately return to his stance and raised his face, but ahead of his line of sight, Irene was glaring at Ayato with eyes filled with anger.

".....I see. I didn't think that you would aim at Gravi-Sheath.....!"

That's right. The very aim of Ayato was the destruction of Gravi-Sheath.

Originally, destroying an ogre lux was next to impossible undertaking, but if the side which attacked was an ogre lux of the same level, then it was not impossible.

If he had succeeded in doing so, the battle would have been almost settled, but now that his aim was found out, there would not probably be a second chance.

"It was close, but it's time-out, Ayato."

Julis called out there with a serious expression.

".....I know."

It was the best hand that the current Ayato could consider, but there was no help for it since it failed.

Ayato nodded and renewed his feelings.

"Seriously, you've shown me various things through all possible means. Well, I better return the favor.....!"

Gravi-Sheath in Irene's hand strengthened the purple light as if it was also angry.

"—Ten thousand folds Destroyer(Diez Mil Fanega)!"

As Irene wielded Gravi-Sheath, gravity balls appeared in the air. They were as big as a fist - smaller than those until now.

However — their number was astounding.

"Oi oi....."

Julis muttered with a cramped face.

The gravity balls were rapidly increasing their numbers before their eyes; and it wasn't on the order of ten or twenty. At least, there was no doubt that it was exceeding one hundred.

"I said it before, but I'm not that good at control. But well, with this, it doesn't matter.....!"

"Julis! I will be all right, so focus on your own defense. And then....."

"Ah, I know!"

While hearing Julis' reply, Ayato set up Ser-Versta before him.

"Be crushed and disappear!"

At the same time that Irene swung downward Gravi-Sheath the multiple gravity balls attacked aiming at Ayato.

There was only about ten percent of the number, which headed towards Julis.

However, it was natural when thinking about Irene's aim. Anyway, with that much, Julis should be able to protect herself.

As Ayato deeply inhaled, he focused his mind. He made an image of a small circle around him and strained his consciousness into it.

—This circle was Ayato's absolute defense zone.

"Amagiri Bright Dragon Style Intermediate Technique — < Arrow Clearing Crow>."

The gravity balls that fiercely came to attack him were all bisected the instant they penetrated that zone.

With a flash-like slash, Ayato continued to repulse the swarm of gravity balls, which came to attack in succession from all directions, without letting even one pass. The gallery, let alone Ayato's sword flash, was probably not even seeing his arm which was swinging that sword.

"Oi oi, seriously....."

Seeing the number of gravity balls decreasing before her eyes, Irene's expression was warped in shock.

And, as Ayato confirmed that the number already decreased to less than half, he launched himself upon them this time. He slowly slipped through the gravity balls, and jumped into Irene's reach at a stretch.

"Tch!"

As Irene also immediately coped with it, she set up Gravi-Sheath and attacked Ayato.

Gravi-Sheath and Ser-Versta clashed and sparks danced violently.

Ayato and Irene continued to lock blades at close range while they steadily gain and lose ground to one another, but before long Irene greatly leapt back at Ayato's sword pressure, as if having been sent flying.

"Julis!"

As Ayato shouted so, Julis, who had dodged all the gravity balls, responded to it.

"Leave it to me!"

A magic circle appeared where Irene was about to land.

It was Julis' setting type ability.

"Come out — Glorious Rending Flame Claw Flower(Gloriosa)!"

A huge flame claw blew up from the ground to crush Irene.

"Hahaha! Your lure was obvious!"

In fact, Irene seemed to have anticipated it from the beginning.

She thrust Gravi-Sheath in the ground, and easily shattered the magic circle, which was brightly shining. The flame claw also shook like a heat haze, and vanished.

It was a clear failure.

—But, it was fine.

"Oh, it's fine even it's obvious — that's just a simple decoy."

"What did you say.....!?"

Color of surprise floated on Irene's face, and a magic circle appeared again at her feet.

No, saying at her feet would not be exact.

Its size was ten times more than that of earlier, and the diameter was lightly exceeding twenty meters.

"It's the skill of the highest heating power among my setting type abilities, you should fully taste it!"

At the same time that Julis, who set up Aspera Spina, swung it downward, the magic circle shone red. One could clearly see a huge amount of mana flowing into there.

"Damn it!"

Irene started running so as to escape, but there was no way that she could make it in time.

"Come out — Great Sparkling Bomb Ring Flower(Rafflesia)!"

At that moment, a flame flower of extraordinary size swelled up, and an earsplitting roaring sound wrapped the stage. A storm-like blast violently blew, and scorching heat reached all the way to Ayato, who had taken enough distance. Even the gravity balls that were remaining in the air were all vanished by that after-effect.

It was a tremendous power far beyond imagination.

In fact, since this skill consumed a great amount of prana, it apparently took a lot of time and effort to prepare it.

Julis was secretly advancing the preparations while supporting Ayato, who was fighting at the vanguard.

"O-Onee-chan!"

Priscila with a pale face tried to approach, but since the fumes from the explosions have not yet cleared up, the situation inside could not be perceived.

Since a Starpulse Generation instinctively invested all his prana in defense when he faced a life crisis; unless in extreme circumstances, she should not be in a life-threatening situation, but with this, even Irene and Gravi-Sheath would not probably get away unscathed.

—However.

"! Impossible.....!"

In the center of the crater caused by the explosion, looking downward was the figure of Irene, who was loosely standing while carrying Gravi-Sheath in her hand.

Her clothes were burnt everywhere, but injuries that could be called injuries were nowhere to be found.

And a huge gravity ball was floating around Irene so as to protect her.

"Don't tell me she held down the blast with Gravi-Sheath's ability.....? No, but, it should not have such an ability....."

Julis muttered with an amazed face.

Ayato was also thinking the same thing. From the power that Irene used so far, it was very unlikely for her to hold an attack of that power. Even if by

any chance she managed to do so, then she would certainly lose her life as the price<sup>[36]</sup>.

(If so, was she not fighting seriously until now.....? No, that can't be.....)

"Thanks God! Onee-chan!"

Priscilal ran up to her while letting brighten with energy, but Irene still looking downward did not move.

(—!)

At that moment, an ominous feeling crossed Ayato's mind.

At the same time, in Ayato's hands, Ser-Versta wriggled as if shivering.

"Onee, chan.....?"

As Priscilal felt a discomfort, she stopped several steps in a place slightly far to Irene.

She tightly grasped both her hands in front of her chest, and stared at Irene with an anxious expression.

Then, for the first time, Irene moved.

With an unsteadily disorienting pace, she slowly headed towards Priscilal.

Priscilal slightly stepped back.....then tripped and fell down.

"It's bad!"

"Hey, Ayato!"

The moment when Ayato was about to suddenly start running — a tremendous pressure attacked both of them.

"Urgh.....!"

"Wh-What, is it.....!"

Both Ayato and Julis were pressed against the ground with no way to perform a technique. The ground got cracked by the pressure; pain and feeling of oppression enough to make them lose consciousness if they relaxed their attention, attacked their whole body.



Gravi-Sheath gravity manipulation — that, they knew. But, its range and power could not be compared to those until now. Almost the whole stage was covered with the purple glow, let alone standing, they were not even able to speak. As if a mountain was riding on top of their body.

As they somehow managed to move their head and turned their line of sight to Irene and Priscilal, Priscilal was held in Irene's left hand, completely exhausted. And Irene's fangs were sticking out on her neck.

"Argh.....I don't know what on earth is happening.....!"

Julis groaned in a voice, which was squeezed out.

"Probably.....that's not Irene. It's Gravi-Sheath.....!"

"What, did you say.....?"

In contrast to Julis, who was surprised, for some reason Ayato had the firm belief, that his intuition was correct.

Gravi-Sheath took over Irene's body. Its scythe, which emitted the sinister purple glow, as usual looked as if it was laughing while shaking with a clattering sound.

"Anyway, at this rate, Priscilal will be in danger....."

Priscilal was having her blood sucked by Irene since a little while ago. However much she was a Regenerative, if she continued to pay the price for this much ability, Priscilal's life would be in danger for sure.

As Ayato mustered his strength and somehow managed to raise his body, he began to walk little by little towards Irene.....Gravi-Sheath.

His body seemed to be heavily torn off and a violent pain was running about his whole body. This was not only Gravi-Sheath's ability, but it was probably also because the limit of the seal release had already passed.

Probably he could only hold on for one more minute. If the seal got back in this situation, it would be the end.

However, however much he was encouraged or scolded, his feet were heavy and his pace progressed slowly. It was only a dozen meter of distance, but it felt as if it was dozens of times that.

Even so, he could not give up here.

Originally, in the Festa there was the rule, which said that the loss of consciousness was considered a defeat. Since the judgment should be performed by the school badge measuring vital reactions, the sentence of defeat being not considered here meant that Irene's consciousness might still slightly remain.

If so, he could only gamble on it.

"Irene.....!"

In a place where he got off to ten meters, Ayato strained his voice.

There was no reaction. But, Gravi-Sheath was only laughing in her hand.

Five meters remaining.

A little more and it would enter Ayato's reach.

"Come to your senses, Irene! You must not mix important things with power!"

Several more steps.

Ayato shouted.

"Irene! If it's something really important, you must grab it with both your hands! Think about which way you desire now!"

For an instant.

Just for an instant, light returned to Irene's eyes.

"Ah....."

The abnormal gravity vanished, the purple light weakened and silence fell as if the world completely changed.

—However.

"Uoooooooooooooh!"

The next moment, a pressure stronger than that a little while ago along with Irene's scream, squashed Ayato once again.

Irene drooped just like that completely exhausted, and vitality was instantly lost from her body. Even so, her right hand did not let Gravi-Sheath go.

—No, it did not leave. Irene was no longer the user of Gravi-Sheath, but she was just a part which supplied fuel (prana) to it. And probably, if it ended, she would be discarded.

Thrusting its tip on the ground, Gravi-Sheath, which emitted the sinister purple glow, shrilly laughed.

Before the eyes of those who reached out to a ray of hope, it enjoyed reaping that hope, in order to drive them to despair remembering that loud malicious laughter.

Under the pressure as if unable to move a single finger, Ayato was feeling a strong bubbling anger welling up.

—A pure anger towards that which trampled down dignity.

He gritted his teeth and strongly grasped Ser-Versta, and as if responding to it, Ser-Versta strongly shook. Ser-Versta was connected to something deep within him — just for a moment.

(This is.....)

Although it could not be expressed with words, at that moment, Ayato certainly felt Ser-Versta's will.

What was over there was.....if one were to forcibly look for a word close to human emotions, it would be "discomfort". Something like a strong discomfort towards Gravi-Sheath.

And then a will, which sought something from Ayato.....or rather test him.

As if it said "try it if you can do it"—

"Didn't I tell you before that I hate being tested.....?"

Ayato stood with all the power he could muster while saying so.

In the world colored with a purple shine, Ser-Versta's Ulm mana dite emitted a red light. It gradually increased its strength, and gradually eroded the purple light as if burning a paper.

Ser-Versta was a poor-defense demon sword that burned away all of creation.

If it was the case, then.

"Haaaaah!"

Using all of his strength, Ayato mowed down the empty space with Ser-Versta.

—At that moment, the purple shine, which completely covered the world, was bisected.

Gravi-Sheath's laughter froze.

The abnormal gravity vanished once again. —However, from the source this time.

It was probably for just an instant that Gravi-Sheath's power was cut off.

And the time of that moment was enough for Ayato.



As Ayato instantly shortened the distance, he slashed at Gravi-Sheath from a low position and splashed it from Irene's right hand.

And as he scowled at Gravi-Sheath, which fluttered in midair while rotating, it rained down in accordance to gravity and was cut down by Ayato as it passed by, as his wrist returned, the ground was pierced in order to stop.

"Amagiri Bright Dragon Style Sword Intermediate Technique — <Serene Inner Self>"

In one beat, dissonance like rubbing glass resounded toward the stage.

There was no telling how many people there were, who had realized that it was the death agony of an ogre lux.

In any case, at the same time as it broke off, countless cracks appeared in Gravi-Sheath's appearance, and it shattered to pieces.

At the same time the mechanical voice declared the conclusion.

"Irene Urzaiz and Urzaiz Priscilal, loss of consciousness."

"Winner, Amagiri Ayato & Julis-Alexia Van Riessfeld!"

While the best cheers of the tournament were shaking the stage, Ayato fell down as is, lying down with arms and legs spread out, and deeply exhaled.

## Epilogue

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As Priscilal slowly opened her eyelids, the first thing that came into her sight was the face of the most important person to her.

Seeing her older sister, who floated a gentle wry smile without saying anything, at the same time she felt relieved, an inappropriate question suddenly crossed her mind.

She wondered since when, she had not very much seen her older sister smiling from the bottom of her heart. Certainly, her older sister had always been hot-tempered and coarse, but she was above all someone, who laughed more often.

".....What's wrong? Do you hurt anywhere?"

To her sister, who looked into her face as she was worried, Priscilal slightly shook her head.

When looking around, she was apparently in a hospital room. In a room clean and cozy, with white walls and ceiling, Priscilal was laid in a bed.

It was the health ward of Le Wolfe. If not, then this was probably a medical center.

She traced her memory to know why she would be in a place like this, and immediately remembered.

(That's right. In the middle of the battle, Onee-chan's behavior became strange.....)

She remembered until there, but after that, it became vague in any way.

"Err, why am I....."

"You ran out of prana. You probably don't remember, but it seemed that I sucked too much of your blood."

As her sister said so, she quickly bowed her head with a face likely to burst into tears.

"I'm sorry.....!"

"No."

Priscilal shook her head with a light smile.

Though vaguely, there was a conviction only there. That<sup>[37]</sup> was not her sister.

That was surely—

"So, how did the match turn out?"

"We lost."

Although she somehow already knew, but asked just in case, her sister frankly said.

"I see....."

Since her big sister probably did not come out with high hopes to begin with, it was fine.

"Then — what about Gravi-Sheath?"

Then, her big sister greatly exhaled with a flat face.

"It was broken."

"Eh.....?"

"That bastard Amagiri smashed it to pieces."

She constantly shrugged her shoulders while sighing.

Priscilal was surprised for a moment — and then slightly burst into laughter.

"Ahahaha, I see.....Amagiri-san did that, huh."

Priscilal recalled the face of the good-natured boy.

In that case, then I should think about something to thank him again. I will make a more luxurious dinner this time, she thought.

"Ah, but then, were you scolded by the president.....?"

Gravi-Sheath was not her sister's personal possession. She borrowed it from Le Wolfe — thus from the Integrated Enterprise Foundation.

"No. Surprisingly, there was no blame."

"Is that so?"



"Yeah. Well, since I was not able to carry out this order, the debt won't decrease."

Her sister said so and dejectedly dropped her shoulders.

"All that wasted labor I've done.....Haa."

It seemed that her big sister's expression was rather lucid even though she said so.

"Well, I might also have been a little impatient, so it can't be helped."

Looking at her sister, who was scratching her head, Priscilal also raised her face.

".....You see, Onee-chan."

"Hmmm?"

"I had thought that what Onee-chan wants to do is the most important thing. Of course, it went without saying that I would stop you, if you behaved violently and tried to do bad things, but even so, it's because Onee-chan had always cherished me the most."

That's right. Priscilal had thought so all the time.

That was why, so as not to be a burden for her big sister, she did the best she could in the scope of what she could do. If it was the best thing for her sister and for herself.

It was probably the same for her big sister. Since her big sister was really a gentle person, she had probably been thinking so; that it would be better if she fought alone, and it would be better if she shouldered everything.

But surely, only that was not enough anymore. At least, they continued to live in this city.

Just being protected was not good, and just protecting was not good, either.

If someone extends their hand to you, you should also extend your hand to them (in turn), if they pull you up, you should stand up by yourself. If they embrace you, you must also return the embrace; otherwise it wasn't on equal footing.

"However — I want to become strong. If Onee-chan fights, I want to fight together with you. I don't want to be always protected; I want to stand next to Onee-chan."

"Priscilal....."

"It's no use even if you try to stop me. And someday.....I will absolutely become stronger than Onee-chan."

Irene looked at Priscilal with an astonished face, but she soon burst into laughter.

In a happily and heartily refreshing state.

"Hahaha, I see — I'm looking forward to it."

It was a smile like Irene that Priscilal saw for the first time in a long time

---

In the space window of the student council room, the conclusion scene of today's match was reflected just now. It was a live video, but something recorded.

Ayato's Ser-Versta splendidly crushed Irene's Gravi-Sheath, and Ayato's and Julis' victory was declared.

"Hmm....."

Dirk was looking at it as he let a candid feeling of disgust blur on his face as usual.

"—Well, it's something like this."

He removed his gaze of the screen while murmuring to himself.

The original purpose of crushing Amagiri Ayato could not be achieved, but there were also many gains. So he should settle with it.

Having lost Gravi-Sheath was slightly unexpected, but since the Ulm mana dite which was the core was collected, there was no particular problem. Rather, with the matter of this time, that should also become a little quiet.

Irene and Priscila were still of use to him. Above all, it was an unexpected result that they were able to make a connection with Amagiri Ayato. With this, the measures, which he could adopt, increased remarkably.

And above all — there was this.

Dirk returned once again his gaze to the screen, Ayato, who was lying on his back there, was in agony with a painful expression.

『Uh-oh, what on earth is this? Player Amagiri can't get up! Châm-san, does this mean after all that he suffered considerable damage?』

『Hmm, well.....no, but this mana is clearly.....』

Then, many magic circles shining around Ayato appeared, binding chains, which emerged from there, climbed all over his body.

And the moment that a big light shone, all of them vanished.

What was left was only Ayato completely exhausted.

『Eh? Huh.....?』

『.....Player Amagiri's prana, which was that much, has extremely dropped. Maybe that usual is not a performance at all—』

Dirk turned off the space screen there, and snorted.

He had heard the rumors, and it was uncertain, but this was now clear.

—Amagiri Ayato could maintain that power only for a certain period of time.

Probably the guys of other academies also arrived at the same conclusion.

That said, there might be still doubt about it; but Dirk was sure of it.

After all, he had also seen before that power, which was binding Ayato.

In any case, if this became public, it would become extremely difficult for Ayato and Julis to win and advance to the next round after this, and at this rate, it was certain that they would come to a deadlock in the near future.

"Was it rash for me to have made the "cats" get ready?"

His next trick had not yet completely moved over, so he might invest them in another mission now.

However, Dirk immediately shook his head and denied his own words.

"—No, wrong. It's the younger brother of that woman. No one knows what might happen."

In fact this time, Ayato, despite the short time, succeeded in pulling out a portion of Ser-Versta's power. Though whether he would be able to master it was questionable, it would be better safe than sorry<sup>[38]</sup>.

As Dirk thuddingly put his short feet on the brand new office desk, he deeply exhaled.

According to Dirk's scheming, it was probably going to be close to the spider web.

The countless plans spread around at all places, even if one of them was discontinued, would squeeze some profit somewhere different.

That was why Dirk had never happened to lose.

Even now and probably in the future.

"If there is a cause for concern, it would be the damn kids of World Dragon, but how far will they take out the dabble.....Besides, I'll have to keep tabs on the lassie of Allekant....."

While grumbly muttering, the <Tyrant> immersed himself in a complex thinking.

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"A-Are you all right, Ayato-senpai?"

Kirin, who jumped in the waiting room in a state of panic, anxiously looked into the face of Ayato, who was lying on the sofa.

"Ah, yes. I'm all rig.....!"

Ayato, who had put a wet towel on his forehead, frowned at the pain that ran through his whole body which he tried to raise.

".....You don't seem to be so all right."

Saya, who came out from behind Kirin, also had a somewhat anxious expression.

".....Well, it can't be helped since you act rashly so much. After all, you exceeded your original limit for nearly one minute."

As Julis said so while sighing, she replaced the towel on Ayato's forehead.

Its coldness was quite pleasant to his body, which was hot.

"But well, it was also grandly exposed....."

Although they cancelled the winner interview and retired in the waiting room, it had already been widely known that there was some kind of limit to Ayato.

That said, in a sense it could not be helped. It was unavoidable that it would have been exposed someday; it was just that it had been somewhat earlier than expected.

The problem was—

"The next match."

As expected, Claudia, who was worried about Ayato and came to see his condition, pointed it out.

"Haa.....Exactly."

Julis greatly sighed once again while holding her temple.

The backlash of breaking the seal was strong, and given the situation Ayato could not satisfactorily move nearly a whole day.

Since the recovery itself would be fast if he quietly rested, he might somehow manage after the second day, but.....

"After all, the fifth round is already tomorrow. We must think of something."

".....Well, I will somehow manage."

"Ho~ou—"

As Ayato said so, Julis glared at Ayato with half-opened eyes and tightly grabbed his arm.

"Ooouch.....!"

"How can you say such, when you're in this state? You're overly optimistic, you know?"

As she released her hand, Julis said amazed.

"It's not really like I'm overly optimistic. I understand that it's serious. But — I can't afford to break a promise."

"A promise?"

"I will become Julis' strength, haven't I said so? At this rate, I won't be able to do it. So, I will somehow manage."

"Wha-.....!"

Julis' face quickly turns red and she looked away as she was flustered.

"I-Idiot! When I wondered what you would say, you suddenly.....!"

Then Saya and Kirin broke in there.

".....Okay. Then, I'll help Ayato so that he can quickly recover."

"I-I will also anything! I will make rice balls, too!"

"Ei, you should rather worry about your match!"

As she looked at Ayato, who smiled wryly at Julis and the others, Claudia was standing to Ayato's side before he knew it. Her expression was gentle and warm as usual.

"If you get over tomorrow for the time being, the time period before the next quarterfinals will contain an adjustment day. You will also be able to rest. However....."

"Yeah, that's right."

Even if they were able to survive tomorrow, at this rate, they would repeat the same thing. They had to find a fundamental solution.

"Whew....."

As Ayato exhaled, he quietly closed his eyes.

It seemed like he had to seriously face this seal soon somehow.

—And it meant that he must face his big sister's disappearance.

## References

1. ↑ Either referring to "gathering clouds", that is "trouble on the horizon" or Ama-no-Murakumo no Tsurugi, the Kusanagi Sword <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ama-no-Murakumo-no-Tsurugi>
2. ↑ Referring to those next highest in rank and thus making good progress towards becoming one of the Top Twelve.
3. ↑ Thick Japanese wheat noodles.
4. ↑ [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moratorium\\_\(law\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moratorium_(law))
5. ↑ It means here that if, for example, they were stronger last year in the Phoenix, this year, they could be stronger in the Gryps and the next year in the Lindvolus and so on. Their strength varied every year.
6. ↑ The 'cats' names are 銀目 and 金目, no doubt you would call them the "Odd Eyes" as a "team name" in English: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Odd-eyed\\_cat](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Odd-eyed_cat)
7. ↑ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alumnus>
8. ↑ Japanese lunch box
9. ↑ or multi-tiered food boxes: multi-tiered compartment sets that also features a built in bowl to assemble anything further– all in a playful design
10. ↑ former female student
11. ↑ as to say a weapon generally used only for attack
12. ↑ this president refers to student council president of her former academy World Dragon
13. ↑ adaptable fighting potential
14. ↑ [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/High\\_five](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/High_five)
15. ↑ simply put, one can say that about half of the student were going back home and the other half remained in the school
16. ↑ AI: Artificial Intelligence
17. ↑ big brother; here is said in form of respect
18. ↑ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taijutsu>
19. ↑ Ojisan literally means Uncle in Japanese. Can also be used as a slightly impolite way to address a middle aged man, similar to the English "Mister"
20. ↑ He did not even know specifically where that feeling came from

21. ↑ here small grains are comparable to weak contestants.
22. ↑ Onee-chan is Japanese for older sister
23. ↑ Senjutsu (仙術; English TV "Sage Jutsu"; Literally meaning "Sage Techniques") refers to a specialised field of techniques that allows the user to sense and then gather the natural energy (自然エネルギー, shizen enerugī) around a person
24. ↑ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taijutsu>
25. ↑ In Japanese, "katana" means a long sword and it represents a blade, which is a little curved, with a single edge and a very sharp point.
26. ↑ It means that their names are not recorded in the Named Charts
27. ↑ name of Kirin's katana
28. ↑ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Camellia> and images of it are the red flower at the top of this page:  
[http://www.nagominoniwa.net/blog3/2013/07/post\\_852.html](http://www.nagominoniwa.net/blog3/2013/07/post_852.html)
29. ↑ here it means the drawing of lots for each match
30. ↑ I mean here the staff of the student council
31. ↑ The Bloody Scythe of Supreme Destruction
32. ↑ here refer to the members of the Integrated Enterprise Foundation
33. ↑ for those, who have forgotten, Gravi-Sheath is the Bloody Scythe of Supreme Destruction, the ogre lux used by Irene
34. ↑ here also means that Gravi-Sheath required a huge amount of prana to activate its ability
35. ↑ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chakram>
36. ↑ price here refers to compensation that an ogre lux takes to its user in exchange for the use of its ability
37. ↑ "That", in other words, Priscila thought that the one, who sucked too much her blood during the battle, was not her sister; that's why she felt relieved
38. ↑ it's an idiom; means something that you say which means it is best not to take risks even if it seems boring or hard work to be careful



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